



# A THIRD PERSON

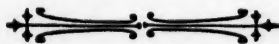
A NOVEL

BY

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ETC., ETC., ETC.



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# A THIRD PERSON.

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## CHAPTER I.

"BABY BAGGOT."

"A youth of frolic, an old age of cards."

—POPE.

IF Mrs. Harrington Baggot, had not written a shamefully careless hand, and made impossible figures — her threes like fives, her nines indistinguishable from sevens — perhaps her nephew, Roger Hope, might have remained heart-whole until the present hour. Who knows? Who knows how much may depend upon the hasty scratch of — a pen? Captain Hope, knocked and rang at 13, Holland Gardens, instead of at No. 15, and saw his fate at the window! It was almost dusk, on a soft September evening, and as the new arrival waited on the steps, he glanced involuntarily into an adjacent casement, and found himself face to face with a tall girl, who was leaning her forehead against the sash in a despondent attitude, and looking intensely miserable. For half a second, their eyes met, and then she drew hastily back, and was

immediately swallowed up, in the shadows of the room.

"Who could she be?" Roger asked himself. Not one of his cousins, surely — they were years his senior. So perplexed was he, by the momentary vision, that when the door was eventually opened, by a man servant of severe aspect, there was an appreciable pause, before he could collect his wits and ask:

"Is Mrs. Baggot at home?"

To which he received the unexpected answer:

"No, sir; next house; No. 15."

\* \* \* \* \*

Morptingham, is a provincial town of considerable importance and still greater pretensions — the favourite resort, of a certain class, who seek genteel and congenial society, moderately-rented houses, and cheap schools. The actual, town is comparatively small; it is, so to speak, choked up, by the overwhelming extent of its suburbs, with their terraces, places, rows and gardens. The population chiefly consists of school-boys, retired officers, Indian civilians, and a few of the clergy; there is also a fair allowance of doctors, and whole brigades of pretty girls; but young men above the age of seventeen, are almost as rare as black swans. The sons of numerous families, have invariably left the parental nest, and winged their way out into the

world. Some are soldiers, some are sailors, some are engineers or doctors, others are stockmen, railway guards, or shepherds, whilst a few have gone under in the great struggle for existence, and become that pitiable spectacle in Eastern lands, the European loafer, or the dreaded Australian "sun-downer." Occasionally, at long intervals, some of these absent ones return to Morpington, and when a household is about to welcome a son, a nephew, or even an uncle on leave, his advent—if he is unmarried—is an event that is joyfully hailed in local society. The gardens and terraces in the immediate neighbourhood issue invitations to tea, cosy little luncheons, and even dinners, and the new arrival receives, more formal calls, from elderly gentlemen in one day, than in all the years of his previous life.

Mrs. Baggot, a widow lady, residing at No. 15, Holland Gardens, is the centre of interest at the present moment, within a radius of at least two postmen's beats. She is known to be expecting her nephew—her sister's son—and has made no secret of the fact, that he is young, tolerably good-looking, and a bachelor. This callous, phlegmatic old woman, is not nearly as much excited about her guest, as are the four Miss Strattons; who live just across the road, and have been peeping over their blinds since ten o'clock in the morning. Mrs. Baggot, received and sped, arrivals and departures

with the utmost serenity—possibly the result of a protracted residence in the East, where society is constantly fluctuating ; and just now, when the young ladies over the way, are on the tip-toe of expectation, and when her nephew, is actually ringing a loud peal at the wrong house, she is comfortably buried in an arm-chair and a novel, her cap askew, and one slipper off, lost to the existence of any one, but the hero of her story ! Roger's room is ready,—Annie has seen to it, and that there is a nice dinner, and plenty of cigars, and soda water, in the house. Watching for people, never brings them any sooner ; indeed, she might have added, with truth, that she rather hoped, Roger would not put in an appearance, until she had closed her third volume.

Mrs. Baggot had lived in Morpington for ten years, in spite of which long residence among them, many of its inhabitants declared, "that they could not make her out." Some said, she was a charming woman, full of wit, vivacity and fascination ; others, that she was a wicked old creature, whose morals, and complexion, would not bear the most superficial scrutiny. Others, again, calmly dismissed her as mad.

In truth, she was neither mad nor bad—not even as Tallyrand expressed himself to two companions, *entre les deux*. Merely a woman of sixty, blessed

with a superb constitution, an extraordinary supply of animal spirits, and the energy of a champion tennis player.

In spite of her somewhat advanced years, this exceptionally favoured matron, displayed an insatiable appetite for enjoying life, and absolutely refused to range herself as an old lady. Her two daughters (a widow and a spinster) were powerless to restrain their sprightly parent ; she was cleverer than either, with a decided will, and an income of eighteen hundred a year—of which the reversion, remained entirely in her own hands.

Mrs. Baggot's career may be summed up in a few sentences. Married at nineteen, she had gone out to India with her husband, and found it to be a country, entirely after her own heart. She liked the continued change of residence, the constant moves, the immense variety of acquaintances ; and India, so to speak, liked her. She was pretty, good-humoured, and gay ; she never made spiteful speeches, threw over partners at dances, or, most fatal step, shared a house with another lady — consequently, she had many friends. She sang, and acted well, and entered enthusiastically into every scheme of amusement, on the plains in winter, and the hills in summer.

Years rolled on, her husband rose in his profession, became grey, stout, and elderly ; not so his wife ;

she still danced, and sang, and acted, and rode, and when her girls appeared upon the scene—kept at home till they were out of their teens—she accepted the post of *chaperon*, in a sisterly fashion, introduced her partners, sang duets with her dear children, rode with them, acted with them, and did all in her power to get them satisfactorily married. Now the Misses Baggot may have been—and doubtless were—good, but they were by no means beautiful; moreover, they were dowdy, and dull; and people were amused to witness the singular spectacle, of a mother waltzing untiringly all night, whilst her unappreciated daughters, sat benched among the wallflowers! However, in due time, Clara, the youngest, became engaged to Mr. Skyler, a civilian of some standing, and the wedding took place with considerable *éclat*; but Annie, the elder, seemed likely always to remain a home bird. “She is such an excellent girl,” her friends would declare, “quite a domestic treasure; but, poor dear, she is so plain, with her brick-dust complexion, and drab-coloured eyes, and hair.”

Alas! for those grand old days, when every young lady who rounded the Cape, was married as a matter of course. In former times, when the century was young, and when people spent months *en route* to Calcutta—meanwhile making life-long enemies, or friends—a man was prepared to marry,

and settle down in the East; there was no such thing, as running home in fifteen days; he deliberately accepted his fate, and was only too eager to propose, to the first fresh-looking English girl, whom Providence (or her relations) threw in his way. But this was forty years ago, and even had Annie Baggot lived in those excellent times, she might have found a certain amount of difficulty in being mated; as it was, she returned to England on her father's death, plain Miss Baggot, in every sense of the word, and settled down at Morpington, as her mother's housekeeper, companion and *chaperon*; for she was exceedingly prim, and much older, and more staid in her tastes, and pursuits, than her volatile parent.

The rector of the parish, the tradespeople, and the servants, had the deepest respect for Miss Baggot, with her regular attendance at matins, her punctually paid red pass books, and her bright bunch of keys; she experienced no difficulty in falling into the ways of English society, and what was equally important, the ways of English domestics, whereas Mrs. Baggot, was of comparatively small account—save that she signed the cheques.

A woman who sailed out of church before the sermon, who attempted to bargain in shops — forgetting that she was no longer in the land of hawkers — and who occasionally so far forgot herself, as to



address her servants in Hindustani, and who on her first arrival, had frequently been heard to scream, in accents of an unknown tongue, the curious words "Qui hye."

Annie never shared her mother's cravings for "a run up to town," for going to theatres, and subsequently partaking of tasty little suppers; she did not glory in hansoms, or cross the street, with her most fascinating smile, to accost young men of her acquaintance; she neither smoked cigarettes, danced round dances, or sang in the local glee club. Now Mrs. Baggot did all these things; and it was small wonder, that ladies of her own age, who had long succumbed to time, and wore their own respectable white hair, and comfortable cap and spectacles, and were afraid of the damp, of draughts, and of burglars, did not approve of their evergreen contemporary.

This vigorous, and vivacious, lady always announced, that she was "precisely the age she felt, which was thirty," thus cutting down her years by one half, and becoming junior, to her own children! She had kept her figure—which was plump, but not fat; she had a remarkably pretty foot, (hence ill-natured people said she was constantly losing her shoe), and wore a most superior fringe of false chesnut curls (of which she was not a whit ashamed, indeed she referred to it openly, to the

great scandal of her relations), an aquiline nose—that seemed made expressly for a *pince-nez*—and a pair of expressive eyes, were not the least of Mrs. Baggot's attractions. She dressed in the height of the fashion, and her gorgeous tea-gowns, and rich dinner toilettes, were another cause of offence; they were far too showy, and quite preposterously young. Their wearer, frankly enjoyed every hour of existence, from her "Cho'ah Hazree" and her letters, to the hour when she removed her jaunty cap, and *toupee*. She was untroubled by domestic worries—they were exclusively Annie's affair! She ate well, slept well, and had no ailments; she went to "teas," dinners, dances, and concerts; was but an irregular attendant at church, and gave her neighbours one boon—an inexhaustible subject for conversation! Behind her back, they called her "Baby Baggot," but indeed her character, gave scope, for a variety of interpretations.

A ring at the bell, and voices in the hall, startled Mrs. Baggot from the regions of romance. She hastily doubled back her volume—it was only a library book—fished for her shoe, settled her cap at the mirror, and bustled out to greet her nephew.

"Well, Roger," she exclaimed, putting up her face to kiss him, "how are you? Dear me! How nice, to be kissed by a moustache again."

"Mother," expostulated Annie in an agonized

aside, "*the cabman*;" then to that worthy, in a louder key, "Yes, please, take the luggage up to the first floor, and be careful of the paint on the walls."

"Come into the drawing-room with me, my dear boy, and let me have a good look at you," said his aunt, taking him by the arm and leading him up to a window. "I declare," putting on her glasses, and still holding him by the sleeve, "you have actually grown up, quite a good-looking fellow."

Roger laughed, as he rejoined, "Which was evidently, more than you expected!"

"Yes, and dark like all the Hopes: I was the fairest of the family, and I was quite a brunette." The young man's eyes rested for a second, on her bright chesnut fringe, and she continued: "Let me think. Why, it is twelve years, since I saw you last. Do you remember at Lucknow? you had just joined—a lanky, shy, sallow, boy without a word to say for yourself, and all your thoughts concentrated on your boots, and breeches."

"Well, I am thankful, that you find me improved since those days."

"Yes, bold as brass, and brown as a berry would describe you now. Do you know, that you have a little look of my Clara——"

"My dear Aunt Polly, you don't mean to tell me, that she is as bold as brass, and brown as a berry?"

"No, you very rude young man. She is fair, and I am sorry to say she is from home just now, for *she* is the one to entertain you. However, she will be back next week. The subscription dances are coming off soon, and I guarantee you plenty of pretty partners."

"Thanks ; but I doubt if I shall be here. There is likely to be a row, on the borders of the great Indian Empire, and I may be recalled any day."

"Then pray, why did you not come down and see me before, Master Roger ; instead of leaving me to the last, like that ?"

"Last, but not least," he rejoined with a smile.

"Come, come, that is all very fine ; don't imagine that you can appease an old woman like me, with pretty speeches."

All the same, she was secretly delighted with her soldierly-looking nephew ; he had a pleasant voice, a pair of merry dark eyes, and an infectious smile.

"I suppose you are the beauty man, in your regiment ?" she remarked, as she removed her *pince-nez*.

"My dear aunt, surely you were long enough in India, to know that dark people, are not appreciated out there."

"Ha ! ha ! ha !" she laughed. "Yes, coals to Newcastle. I only hope, that the young ladies here, won't turn your head, or steal your heart."

"Oh ! I never had much of a head, at the best of

times ; as to my heart, I don't possess such an organ, in the sense *you* mean."

"What!" in a tone of affected horror. "Gone already! Lost in India?"

"Not likely. There are so many chances of losing it up among the Chin hills ; but I don't intend to marry. Marriage in the army, should be absolutely prohibited. A married officer is a mistake."

"Oh! indeed," rejoined his aunt sarcastically. "You will change your mind, and think very differently, some day."

"For that matter, I do sometimes think differently, as it is ; when I have not a button to my name, and they give us filthy dinners at mess, and the ante-room fire smokes, and fellows argue or bore, I say to myself, 'By Jove, I wish, I was a married man!'"

"Of course you do," agreed the old lady emphatically.

"Yes, for about five minutes, and then when everything is all right, and a lot of fellows from detachment turn up, and we get orders for active service, and are all jolly and cheery, I say to myself, 'I would not be married for a million pounds ;' and in case, you are thinking of getting me settled in life, I warn you, that these are my sentiments."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Roger ; that is all I can say. So you only wish for a wife

when you are ragged, and cross, and hungry ! You must be hungry now. There is the dressing bell—first dinner bugle, you know. Be off, my dear, and get ready ; you need not curl your hair, or wear a button-hole—we are quite alone.”

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE GIRL NEXT DOOR.

“ Across the walnuts and the wine.”

THANKS to Miss Baggot's patient instruction, the cook at No. 15, understood the art of, pleasing the most fastidious palate. Dinner, which proved to be excellent, was served at a round table, lighted by a huge red hanging lamp, whose rosy tints were sufficiently becoming to Mrs. Baggot in a moss green velvet tea-gown, with diamonds in her ears, and an airy arrangement on her head ; also to her nephew, with his dark resolute face. But poor Annie, looked, if possible, plainer than ever. Why did she thus lay down her arms, and make no fight with fate ? Why did she screw her hair off her face, and dress in drab ?

As tasty *entrées* and toothsome savories appeared and disappeared, conversation waxed brisker, especially between aunt and nephew, for Annie had contributed a few bald remarks about the weather,

the dust, and the last Dorcas meeting, and then relapsed into silence.

"By-the-by, I went to the wrong house, by mistake," said Captain Hope.

"Not to No. 13!" repeated Mrs. Baggot tragically.

"Yes, next door. You make your threes so like fives, that I thought you lived at No. 13."

"I am truly thankful to say that I do *not*. I suppose you saw no one, but old Leech?"

"I saw an ancient retainer, who opened the door *quite* at his leisure, and I also saw some one in a bow window. You know, you can almost touch it from the steps."

"Yes, ours is the same; and any one sitting in one bow window sees all that goes on in the other. I just mention this, as a friendly caution! Who did you see?"

"Oh—" and after a momentary pause he replied, "I saw rather a nice-looking girl."

"Ha! ha! Master Roger, how quickly you discovered her. And pray, what was she doing?" demanded his lively aunt.

"As well as I could make out, she appeared to be crying. Perhaps it was only my imagination, or she may merely have been reading 'Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy'—at any rate, she seemed rather sorry for herself."

"She was crying, most probably," returned Mrs. Baggot with conviction. "And I don't wonder; if I were her, I would never do anything else! She leads a miserable life."

"Why, who is she?" inquired the young man.

"She is the granddaughter, of a fierce old veteran, who lives next door—General Yaldwin."

"You don't mean Yaldwin, who was at Mhow years ago? He was the terror of the staff, and never had an A.D.C., longer than a fortnight."

"The very same. He is now the terror of this neighbourhood—myself excepted—but I don't care a button for him. There is the general, his wife, who is rather feeble and almost stone deaf—so much the better for her, poor soul!—and this girl, who is about nineteen, and very pretty in *my* opinion, though to you, fresh from the Chin hills, she may appear only 'rather nice-looking,' mimicking her nephew.

"Oh, come, I say, Aunt Polly, I only saw her for a second, and it was getting dark; but I am prepared to go as far as *you* do, and say that she is very pretty."

"Yes, many people go further than either of us, and declare, that she is lovely. All the same, poor girl, I am sure she often wishes she was dead."

"Mother! how *can* you say such horrible



things?" protested Miss Baggot in a distressed voice.

"I judge her by myself," rejoined her mother briskly. "If I were young and pretty, and in her shoes, I should either hang myself from a hook in the larder, or elope with the milkman."

"My dearest, dearest, mother!" expostulated her offspring.

"Oh, you need not be afraid of my shocking Roger. I am always scaring Annie," she explained, with a nod at her nephew. "She makes me feel quite a child again, and carries me back, to the dear old days, when I had nurse, or governess. I often imagine, that Annie is old Miss Grasper! As for Rose Yaldwin, when I was her age, I had a house of my own, and plenty of fun, whilst she is nothing better than a white slave."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that she does all the housekeeping, for those two cranky old people. One won't eat boiled, the other won't eat roast; one won't drink tea, the other won't touch coffee; one likes open windows, the other a roaring fire. She dresses and waits on her grandmother, and plays cribbage and beggar my neighbour with her, for hours at a stretch; and reads the papers to him, and answers most of his letters."

"Servant, secretary, housekeeper, and playmate,

—she must have her hands pretty full,” said Captain Hope.

“Of course she has, and never a moment to herself. I am surprised she found time to cry!” continued Mrs. Baggot volubly.

“She knows no other young people, unless you consider Annie a young girl; never gets any new clothes — she is disgracefully shabby. I would like to give her a smart hat, only I know, the general would kick it into the street! And her sole relaxation, consists in an hour’s brisk constitutional with him, during which time, they never open their lips. To my certain knowledge, she has led this life for the last three years—and that is why, I call her a white slave.”

“Does she never get a day off duty?”

“Never. The general has one married daughter, a Mrs. Randall, a buxom, bustling, person, with a grown-up family, but they are wise in their generation, and live at a respectful distance from dear grandpapa; *they* know him too well, and leave Rose to bear the brunt of the fray, for she is figuratively chained to the stake, being a friendless, penniless, orphan. Upon my word, if I were her, I would run away.”

Miss Baggot, who had been fidgeting, and making little signals, and long, and vainly, endeavouring, to

stem the current of her mother's discourse, now broke in :

"I am thankful, that Carson has left the room at last. Do you know, mother, that she was drinking in every word you said, and she is certain, to repeat it all to the Yaldwins' cook."

"She is perfectly welcome to do so, my dear," was the undaunted reply. "She cannot tell the woman, anything she does not know already. She knows, that Miss Yaldwin is an orphan, dependent entirely on her grandparents. When they depart this life, and are cremated or otherwise disposed of, Jane Randall will swoop down upon the scene, wind up affairs, inherit their money, and turn the girl adrift. I suppose she will go out as companion ; at any rate, she is thoroughly broken in, and may always come to me for a reference."

"Why don't you have her here sometimes, Aunt Polly?" inquired Roger Hope. "I thought you were fond of surrounding yourself, with young people?"

"She does run in occasionally for a cup of tea, and a little chat, but you see the old lady is rather weak in her mind, and she cannot be left."

"Have they no servants?"

"That's what I am always saying, am I not, Annie?"

"Yes, mother, but don't you think, that Rose

Yaldwin's ears must be almost alight? You have scarcely talked of anyone else, for the last half-hour."

"Her ears alight! Ha! ha! And that reminds me—Roger, light up; where are your cheroots? For my own part, I am going to enjoy a mild cigarette."

Hereupon ensued, the curious spectacle, of an aunt smoking and discussing army topics with her nephew, whilst her much disgusted daughter, withdrew to an arm-chair, and sniffed, and coughed, and tatted, in the background. It was ever thus, since childhood's hour! Poor Annie, was invariably left out in the cold. In the drawing-room, the situation was identical. Mrs. Baggot trailed over to the open piano, spread out her velvet skirts, took off her bracelets, cleared her throat, and broke into song.

How devoutly Annie wished that her mother would *not* sing. How absurd it was to hear a woman of her age, attempting Braga's "Serenata," and bitterly lamenting the lack of a violin accompaniment. Once upon a time, she had possessed a magnificent organ, but now, it had shrunk wofully from its former grand compass. Mrs. Baggot still retained a few sweet notes on her register, of which she made the very most; for she was a thorough musician, and sang with taste; indeed, her singing

was still rather pleasant, when she did not venture to soar beyond her capabilities, and go scampering up the gamut after a high note, which she barely touched with a shriek. On these not very uncommon occasions, the audience would glance at one another significantly, and her daughters' faces would be covered with shame. Musical parties were of constant occurrence, and these unnatural children, were actually thankful, when their mother had a slight hoarseness, or even a cold. There was no use in mislaying her music, or leaving it (purposeily) in cabs; unfortunately, the gifted lady could generally sing without it, and she did not trust to chance or her girls' memories. Once or twice, when they had eagerly whispered to their hostess, that "their mother had not brought her music," she had dumb-founded them, by producing a neatly-folded song from the recesses of her pocket!

Roger, as his aunt soon discovered, had a nice baritone voice, and she immediately hunted up some duets, and sang them with him *con amore*; indeed the pair amused themselves at the piano until it was bedtime. This, was the fashion, in which eccentric Mrs. Baggot, generally contrived to monopolize young men. She was vivacious, entertaining, and well preserved, and therefore, as she would have inquired, with her blandest smile, "Why not?"

## CHAPTER III.

GENERAL, MRS. AND MISS YALDWIN.

"Thou more than soldier, and just less than sage."

—T. MOORE.

THE following day was Sunday, and when Captain Hope came down to breakfast, his aunt, as she glanced at his black coat, exclaimed in a voice of anxious protestation :

"Roger, you don't mean to say, that you are going to church?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. Are not you?"

"No, I was thinking how nice it would be, if you and I, were to take two big wicker chairs, and sit out in the back garden, and have a long chat, and a smoke this lovely morning."

"*Mother*, you seem to forget, that every dining-room window in the road, commands our back garden. Just imagine what the neighbours will say!" urged Miss Baggot, with considerable asperity.

"They say a great deal about me, as it is, my dear, and I'm none the worse for it. I believe the Skinners and the Coombes, call me an old heathen. I suppose they think, the Burmese figure in the hall, is an idol I have imported to worship, and I

know, they declare, that I don't go to church, because the Ten Commandments are too much for me, and make me quite hysterical! However, I must honestly confess, that I'd rather sit out under the little beech tree, with a cigarette, and Roger, among the birds, and flowers, listening to news of old friends—aye, and of old enemies—than be boxed up in a tight pew, in St. Chadwick's, where half the people are watching their neighbours, and looking at, and pricing each other's clothes, and thinking every-day thoughts. I don't very often go to church, Roger——”

“*Very often!*” interrupted Annie. “Why, mother, you know, you have not been there, for two months.”

“Have I not? I did not know, you kept count. Well, I suppose, I may as well go this morning, eh, Roger? It is not far, and we can walk there, in less than ten minutes. I do hope, that they will open the ventilators, and that we shall have some of my favourite hymn tunes.”

Mrs. Baggot required a considerable time to dress; meanwhile, her nephew went out, and smoked a cheroot in the front of the house, and took stock of his surroundings. The villas in Holland Gardens, were semi-detached, substantially-built, grey structures, three stories high, with large bow windows at either side of the hall door; a narrow strip of

garden, planted with trim shrubs, was divided by an iron railing from the neighbouring plot, and a neat gate, with dazzling brass plate, led to each residence. Comfortable, solid, mansions, with immaculate blinds, white steps and burnished letter-boxes—houses, that, if they did not speak of cheerfulness, and gaiety, had gentility, high rent, and solid comfort, written all over them.

Presently Mrs. Baggot appeared, looking absolutely radiant, as she rustled down the gravel path, with a smart French bonnet on her head, a coquettish veil over her face, and her figure enveloped in an elegant mantle. Yes. She was certainly more attractive in appearance, than “poor Annie” (as her mother called her), in a mean little grey, frock, and dowdy brown bonnet.

Handing her church service to her daughter, Mrs. Baggot took her nephew’s arm, and set forth ; her progress was a sort of triumphal march—she met many people, upon whom she beamed ; crowds of ladies, and not a few pretty girls—all without male escort ; and here was she, an old woman of sixty, leaning on the arm, of that extraordinary rarity, a good-looking, young, and unmarried, man. Poor Annie, was, as usual, nought ; and left to bring up the rear alone, though her cousin had relieved her of the books, with which she was laden.



St. Chadwick's was a fashionable church, boasting a fine choir and an eloquent preacher, and was consequently crowded.

Mrs. Baggot swept up the aisle, with the assured gait, of an owner of sittings! and the air of a woman, who would just like to see anyone occupying her pew; and made her way to a seat, in a sufficiently prominent position.

Presently Roger, having stowed away his hat, began to look about him. He noted that his aunt had removed her gloves, and produced a scent bottle—beyond that, he descried quantities of bonnets, some bald, and grey heads, but scarcely a man of his own age. As the organ pealed out the voluntary, and the choir filed in, he was aware that people were arriving at the pew just in front. First came a fragile bent old lady, with a pale, placid face, and an enormous ear-trumpet in her hand; next, a young girl carrying books, and an air-cushion; lastly, an unmistakable soldier, very spare and upright, with a leaden-coloured complexion, heavy moustache, lantern jaw, and an extremely grim expression. "This was the old Tartar," said Roger to himself. Yes, and he looked it too, but a gentlemanly, and well-groomed, Tartar. The younger man's keen eye, noted the immaculate cut of his frock coat, the gloss on his linen, his neat gloves, and above all, the shine on his hat. To General

Yaldwin, the safety of this article, seemed a matter of almost religious care—he held it delicately between a finger and thumb, and from his backward glance, it was evident, that he had been accustomed to stow it away, in Mrs. Baggot's frequently empty pew. As he seemed undecided, and held it with apparent hesitation, Roger Hope, who was notoriously prompt in action, actually seized it out of his hand, and calmly placed it along with his own. No words, could fitly paint, the expression of General Yaldwin's face ; where fury, and astonishment strove for mastery ; but as church, is the one place, where it is impossible to have a row, he was forced to restrain his indignation, and resign himself to circumstances.

Captain Hope, blissfully unaware of the storm of emotion, he had roused in his neighbour's breast, permitted his glances to rove about, in the manner so much deprecated by his aunt. She was now down on her knees, praying audibly, with tightly-closed eyes, and clasped hands—very pretty hands still, and blazing with diamonds. "Was it absolutely necessary to devotion, to remove one's gloves?" her nephew wondered. The general had stuck to his, his granddaughter to hers. It must be admitted, that Captain Hope, instead of attending to the service, was critically watching Miss Rose Yaldwin. She was kneeling down, and he

remarked her slender figure, and the shiny seams of her cloth jacket, her thick plaits of hair, and her shabby limp black hat—and was angrily comparing her garments, with her relatives' broadcloth, and velvet. During morning prayer, a good deal of his interest, was concentrated on the Yaldwin family; on the old lady—who fumbled for surreptitious peppermints—on the general—who repeated the responses, as if he were shouting on parade—but chiefly on the young lady, who found her grandmother's places—following the lines, with a much-mended glove, in order that her too audible responses, might not intrude in the middle of a prayer. In spite of her anxious precautions, this actually did happen once—"our sovereign lady Queen"—"Amen," cried Mrs. Yaldwin's shrill falsetto, which unexpected alteration, in the Christian name of her most gracious Majesty, caused some young people in an adjoining pew, to explode in delighted giggles, and occasioned the general to bestow on his grandchild, a truly savage scowl.

Miss Yaldwin, had a sweet clear soprano voice, but Roger could scarcely hear anything above the piercing notes at his side, for in church, with a grand volume of sound, and other voices around her, Mrs. Baggot let out her own organ, to what had once been its fullest compass, but was now a mere succession, of heartrending shrieks! Service over,

the sermon commenced. Miss Yaldwin found the text for her grandmother, and handed her, her ear-trumpet, through which the old lady piously endeavoured, to catch a clear, eloquent, and concise, discourse. The subject was unselfishness, and self-sacrifice. Would, that some of the good words, would come home to the hearts, of this venerable couple, seated in front of him, thought Roger Hope. Did they realize, that to them, was sacrificed, the youth and what ought to be the happiest days, of the unfortunate girl, who sat between them? No, the old woman's expression, had resolved itself into a vacant, complacent, stare. The general, sat with his arms folded, and an expression about his eyebrows, that seemed to imply that it was all rather poor stuff, and he could deliver, a much better sermon (if so disposed) himself! As for the domestic martyr, Miss Yaldwin, he had come to the conclusion, that she was a good girl; she did not stare about when released from her duties; she had seemed absorbed in prayer—and hers, was no eye service; every movement of her grandmother's was watched; every wish, carefully forestalled; and he had made up his mind that she was an exceedingly tiresome, fidgetty, thankless, old creature.

He was generally presented, with a back view of her hat, but once or twice, he caught a glimpse of

Miss Yaldwin's profile. It was a very nice profile indeed ; with sharply-cut features, and short upper lip. The expression of the face, when in repose, was wistful and abstracted ; with something of austerity in its purity. Life, was evidently a serious business to its owner, and undoubtedly offered her more cares than pleasures. The sermon was followed by a hymn, and the usual collection. In picking up her grandmother's spectacles, the miserable girl in the next pew, contrived to let fall a coin, which rolled along the floor, right out into the aisle, where it spun, and then subsided, with a vulgar coppery clang, as if determined that every one should hear it proclaim : "I am an honest penny." The culprit became scarlet, as she met her grandfather's eye, and so pitiably nervous, that she nearly let fall the alms bag.

"*Idiot !*" hissed the general, as he snatched it out of her shaking hand, and ostentatiously put in half-a-crown. "If you can only behave, like a charity school girl, you had better stay at home."

Roger had been a deeply-interested witness, of all this by-play, and observed the scene, over the top of his hymn-book—whilst his aunt, with a most sanctified expression, sang lustily beside him, indifferent to everything, but the sound of her own shrill voice.

As soon as people began to move, the general's

hat was politely restored to him, and he put his hand upon his pew door, and stood up to depart. Roger rose also, and he and his relatives, filed forth slowly, in the wake of their neighbours. At last they were fairly outside the edifice, and Captain Hope saw Miss Yaldwin, face to face, in broad daylight. Was she pretty? Yes, as pretty as it was possible to be, considering her dowdy dress. Purple-grey eyes, delicate features, and a perfect complexion. She was busily opening her grandmother's parasol, and did not appear aware of his presence. M<sup>rs</sup>. Baggot, who had exchanged genial greetings with the party, now presented Roger to the general, and then walked home between the two men, leaving the three ladies to bring up the rear. General Yaldwin, was notoriously gracious to strangers, truly *joie de rue, douleur de maison*, and received the young officer, most cordially.

"So his regiment was in India—and how much leave had they given him?"

"Six months; he expected to be recalled at any time."

"And his regiment, was quartered at Tilhar, was it not? Capital station, thirty years ago; he had been there himself. Great changes, no doubt. Was the club where it used to be in the civil lines?—and what about the new railway? It was all *dâk* in his day. What about the pig-sticking?"

General Yaldwin was secretly sorry, when Mrs. Baggot came to a halt at No. 15, and he could no longer continue this interesting cross-examination. Roger lingered for a second, in hopes, that he would be introduced to Mrs. and Miss Yaldwin; but no, the old warrior opened his own gate with a clang, and drove his women-folk in before him—first, the tottering old lady, and then the girl:—laden with books, air-cushion, and trumpet.

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“Roger, you nearly made me laugh out loud in church,” said his aunt, as they sat at luncheon. “That would have been a nice scandal! I never had such difficulty in keeping my countenance! You actually took away the general’s hat, and left him gasping with amazement—such a liberty has never been offered him. And you did it so coolly, and with such an air of delicious innocence—you were nearly the death of me.”

“What was he to do with his hat? He was not going to send it round, and as I concluded, that he did not wish to *sit* on it, I took it away.”

“Sit on it! What a profane idea! You could not have noticed it, but you will soon discover, that his hats are one of his hobbies, and are almost sacred.”

“Well, they are a harmless, and inexpensive craze,” said the young man cheerfully.

"Yes, in moderation," remarked Annie, looking up from her plate ; "but he has quite a collection, and keeps them in a glazed cupboard, in his study. He exhibited them to me one day, as a great favour. I think, he must have at least, twenty."

"There must be something dangerous in a quantity of hats, or why do people say 'as mad as a hatter?'"

"The general is as sane as I am," remarked Mrs. Baggot, "though he spends hours, brushing and ironing his hats. He has his garden hat, his everyday hat, his wet day hat, his hat for going down to the club, and his hat, for running up to town."

"Oh, so he does go up to town?"

"Yes, but rarely—too rarely to please his family—only now, and then, on business. Most of his time, he spends in his study, reading the army lists, and the money markets."

"But I conclude he goes to the club, since he has a club hat?"

"Oh, yes ; he patronizes it occasionally. He used to play whist regularly, but no one, will make up a rubber with him now. His language is, to say the least of it, emphatic, and his temper extremely precarious—he does not like to lose."

"I don't know any one that does," rejoined Roger as he rose from the table.

After tiffin, as she called it, Mrs. Baggot went to



her room to lie down—"a good old Indian custom," she declared—and Roger and his cousin, set out for a walk.

It was a most tempting September afternoon, and, as the former expressed it, "a mortal sin to stay indoors." As they passed No. 13, they each cast a glance, into the far bow window, and there descried a forlorn-looking figure, bent a little forward, resting her chin on her hands, and watching passers-by, with wistful eyes.

"*She* won't get out again to-day," observed Annie emphatically.

"And what will she do with herself, all this long afternoon—sit there?" asked her cousin.

"Oh, no; the old lady sleeps after lunch, and he smokes, and writes worrying letters, in his study—I mean, letters, to worry other people."

"A nice, amiable, Sabbath, occupation. And then?"

"Oh, about four o'clock, Rose will make the old lady's tea, and read sermons to him, till dinner-time; after that festive meal, she will put her grandmother to bed, and retire herself; not a pleasant life for a girl of nineteen—I am fond of Rose, and sorry for her."

"Then why, does not your grief, and affection, take some practical shape? Why don't you break her chains, and ask her to go for a walk now and

then? Happy thought!" Suddenly halting, he added, "What do you say; shall we go back, and ask her to come out *now*?"

"No, no," rejoined Annie; "it could not be done to-day; there would have to be quite a formal arrangement, and asking for leave, that would not be managed under a week. I do what I can, and that is but little. My mother, is a great person for non-interference in other people's affairs; she pities Rose as much as I do; but she thinks, that if we took her part, and had a row with the general, she would lose her whist."

"Lose her whist? What do you mean?"

"You see, she is devoted to whist, and so is he; twice a week, he comes regularly, and plays from nine till eleven."

"Double dummy — what maddening, excitement!"

"Not at all! I take a hand always, and am crushed by both, and now you will have to make a fourth."

"Thank you, and you say, that the old gentleman's temper is precarious."

"Yes: I believe he threw his cards at Colonel Waddilove one night at the club, but he is never so violent, in a private house—at least, not in ours; but besides the whist, mother and the general, have other things in common. The same man, does up

their garden, they always engage the same fly, they exchange papers—indeed, they share some. Mother consults him, about her investments, and they mutually borrow stamps, soda water, and step-ladders. It would not be convenient, to quarrel, you see.”

“Yes ; but I cannot see, why you may not borrow the granddaughter, as well as the stamps, and soda water.”

“When you know the general, you will easily comprehend why *not*,” rejoined Annie impressively. “He scarcely ever lets her out of his sight, and only to us ; and we rarely see her, when Clara is at home ; she and Clara do not coalesce.”

“Indeed, and why is that ? ”

“Because Clara cannot (as she says) be bothered with girls ; they are so bread-and-buttery, she declares, and she thinks Rose, has a spice of the family temper, and does not like her.”

“And Miss Yaldwin reciprocates the sentiment, I conclude,” said Roger briskly.

“Yes ; she hates being patronized, and certainly Clara *has* a wonderful knack, of rubbing her up the wrong way.”

“I see,” nodding his head. “I wonder if she will rub me up the wrong way ? ”

“Oh, no, quite the reverse ; she will stroke you

down nicely ; she always gets on with men—that is, with most men.”

“ I notice, that you have made some mental reservation,” he exclaimed with a smile.

“ I have,” replied Annie, who was thinking that her sister’s late husband, was one of the exceptions,—a rather important exception !

“ I must say, that I consider it cruelty to animals, to keep a girl mewed up in the house this glorious day,” said Roger, harking back to their original topic. “ Suppose you ask Miss Yaldwin, to go for a walk to-morrow ? ”

“ A walk with me alone ? ” inquired his cousin demurely.

“ Certainly, if you prefer it. I shall not intrude.”

“ Oh, you may intrude, as you call it, if she comes ; you seem to take a great interest, in her, Roger.”

“ Interest is too strong a word. I am sorry for her. You appear to forget, how your mother worked upon my feelings last night. Yes, I am *very* sorry for her. With her face pressed against the window just now, she looked to me, like a wild bird in a cage.”

“ You are becoming quite poetic,” remarked Miss Baggot, rather irritably. “ Would you be so very sorry, if she were not so pretty ? Come, now, tell me the honest truth.”

And she gazed at him searchingly, with a pair of ugly but sharp little eyes.

"If I am a poet, then you are a cynic, my fair cousin; but in answer to your question, I say, that I believe I would; I cannot be positively certain."

"Do you think her so very pretty?"

"I do: to that query, I am able to give a decided reply."

After a silence of some minutes, she exclaimed:

"We seem to be always talking of our next-door neighbours, as if they were the only people in the world. Just come across the road with me, Roger, and I will introduce you, to the four Miss Strattons."

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## CHAPTER IV.

### MRS. BAGGOT'S BENEVOLENT FUND.

"Such, and so various, are the tastes of men."

—AKENSIDE.

MAJOR-GENERAL WALDWIN, took an early opportunity of calling on his neighbour's nephew. He watched this, to him, most interesting individual, enter the house—which is one of the advantages derived from a semi-detached residence—and soon afterwards, might be seen stalking up the gravel path which led to No. 15, wearing a beautiful pair of shiny boots, and his well-brushed club hat.

The general enjoyed his visit immensely. Here, was a man, with whom he could discuss familiar scenes, and all the latest army news—the new rifle, new drill, and recent royal warrants. When he had bemoaned Jones' promotion, as a fatal mistake; heard how Smith, the son of Black Smith, had bolted with the title deeds of his father's property, and pawned, and lost the proceeds at Monte Carlo; had given his opinion, of the Trans-Caspian railway, and the last little frontier war, he suddenly said:

"By the way, Hope, are you anything of a Philatelist?"

The young man looked rather blank. As far as he knew, he had never heard the word in his life. Was it a science, or a game — or could the general mean philanthropist? Silence was golden in this instance, he felt confident. So he merely replied, by shaking his head, in humble ignorance.

"You are not a Philatelist, then! I am sorry for you. Do you really mean to tell me, that you take *no* interest in foreign postage stamps?" demanded the general rather sharply.

"I must honestly confess, that I do *not*," replied the other boldly. He was not going to be bullied, even by General Yaldwin.

The visitor raised his bushy eyebrows, and exclaimed, "It is a matter of considerable attraction

for me. I go in for foreign stamps, heart and soul, and I have a most rare and valuable collection."

Mrs. Baggot winked expressively, but secretly, at her nephew, and said, "Yes a magnificent collection. You ought to see it, Roger. Mr. Wapshott, too, is another enthusiast, but he has not got nearly as many rare stamps, as the general."

"No, no," acquiesced that gentleman complacently. "A very cheap ordinary lot, such as a schoolboy would have, all except one, and that really *is* a gem. I'd give almost anything, in reason, for it, or its fellow. Indeed, I actually went so far as to offer him fifteen pounds for it, and he had the insolence to laugh in my face. I allude, to the blue Natal ninepenny issue, of 1857."

"Oh, indeed," rejoined Roger with becoming gravity. "I am miserably ignorant on the subject."

"But you need not remain so, my good fellow," cried the general with unexpected warmth. "Come to me, and I'll post you up in stamps. No, my dear madam," waving his hand at Mrs. Baggot, "it is not a pun. Come in, any time you like—say to-morrow afternoon at three o'clock—and I will show you, one of the finest collections in England—no trash."

"I shall be delighted," returned Roger the hypocrite. But he had been brought up to fear, revere,

and respect generals ; and there was an air of command about this old soldier, that was simply irresistible.

" Well, Roger," said his aunt, as she watched the parting guest stiffly descend the steps, " your friends would say you were hard up for amusement, if they heard the gusto, with which you snatched at an old fogey's invitation to look at some trumpery stamps. However, you are stuck fast here, for the next ten days, and must make the best of it. You are engaged to two dinner parties, and three dances, and if you attempt to get out of them, *my* blood will be upon your head ! I have promised for you—you will have to wait until Clara comes home. I wonder, if you will be very much bored next door," and her eyes twinkled mischievously.

" Oh ! I don't suppose I shall. I won't stay long you know."

" My poor, dear, innocent, boy ! He has seven thousand stamps, and you will have to give your opinion of each individually."

" Oh ! I say," protested the young man, " if he lets me in like that, I shall feign illness."

" It will be your only chance," was the cheerful response. " It is a fatal mistake, to exhibit the smallest interest in his craze ; you will be bothered out of your senses, and given commissions, and samples to exchange in your regiment, and I don't



know what not. He has had the stamp mania, for the last six years, and takes everything connected with it, most *seriously*."

"Well, at any rate, it keeps him occupied, and is harmless and cheap," said Roger tolerantly. "*He* may find it a healthy, mental, excitement; at any rate it is less expensive than betting or building, or gambling on the Stock Exchange."

"It is by no means so *cheap* as you imagine. He spends a small fortune, on rare specimens; and will fly up to London, to look at a stamp, far sooner than to meet an old friend. To me, it would be amusing, if it was not pitiful, to see a man who once commanded a division, and was a distinguished soldier, coming down to pasting bits of dirty coloured paper into a book; he has actually compiled a catalogue, and contributes long articles, to some stamp magazines. Mr. Wapshott, is his hated rival, and if you praise his specimens, you are lost, as far as the general's good opinion goes; and his one thorn in the flesh, is that unattainable stamp! I believe he offered two hundred and fifty pounds for it, and his enemy snapped his fingers, under his fine old hooked nose!"

"I have heard people say, that the general had a wonderful good collection," remarked Annie, in her prim level voice, "and that it is worth, several thousand pounds."

"Very possibly!" replied her mother. "At any rate he prizes it above rubies. What a chance for that girl! If I were Rose Yaldwin, I would promptly avenge myself, for years of petty persecution and misery, by one day, consigning the whole precious collection to the flames. Yes, duplicates and all!"

Roger laughed, but Miss Baggot took the matter more seriously.

"Good gracious, mother!" she gasped, "what *will* you say next? I trust, that you will never put such an awful idea into the girl's head; for if she were to do such a thing, as destroy his stamps, the general would kill her in his rage. I don't think you know, what his rages are?"

"Oh, pardon me, I do; you forget that I was present—at least, thank goodness, the railings were between us—the day, he discovered Banks the gardener, digging up all his precious Indian seeds. You need not be alarmed, there will be no murder done next door, as far as I can prevent it; and there is no fear of Rose. She never could bring herself to commit such a desperate crime. I had always a spice of the devil in me, and she has not."

"I would not be so sure of that, mother," retorted Annie; "you should have seen her eyes, one day when the general kicked her little dog."

"You mean that vagabond mongrel, she got leave to take in?"

"Yes ; she loves him as if he were a human being."

"She might well do *that*," assented Mrs. Baggot. "She has not many human beings to love, and I doubt, if a single creature in the world, loves her."

"Oh, mother ! you really do say very shocking things," expostulated her offspring. "Surely her grandfather and grandmother——"

"Annie, you are talking nonsense, and you know it," interrupted Mrs. Baggot impatiently.

"Mrs. Yaldwin, poor soul, is past the stage of loving anything, but her bed, and her dinner. The general—the idea of connecting *him*, with the word 'love' is ridiculous. If he loves any object, under heaven ; it is a dirty, gummy, little, scrap of paper—his rare and most precious darling, that apple of his eye, and comfort of his declining years—an old Finland stamp. If it came to a charitable collection, I am certain we could honestly subscribe, far more affection here, than is felt for Rose next door. I like her, indeed I am fond of her. You like her, Annie ; and Roger"—with a sly glance at her nephew—"will add a small donation ?"

"Yes ; you may put me down for a liberal contribution," returned Roger with unexpected generosity. "I wish it was as easy, to subscribe to other benevolent demands."

## CHAPTER V.

## THE MYNAR GETS INTO DISGRACE.

"Nay, an' thou'lt mouth, I'll rant as well as thou."

—HAMLET.

PUNCTUALLY, at three o'clock the following day, Captain Hope placed his hand, on Mrs. Yaldwin's visitors' bell, and rang a steady peal. He was presently admitted, by the cast-iron butler, who had private soldier, and officer's servant, stamped on his carriage and address. The hall was severely tidy, —sticks and umbrellas, were arranged like stands of arms in a barrack room; whilst the drawing-room, a stern grey apartment, presented a certain resemblance to the general himself—it was stiff, the walls were leaden-colour, and their only ornament, a half-length painting, of the master of the house in full uniform; and a few military sketches, suspended at intervals with military precision; each chair and table, was drawn up in its exact place as if, so to speak, on parade. Close to the window, was seated the old lady, with a knitted shawl over her shoulders, intent on playing, "Beggar my neighbour" with her grand daughter.

"You always get all the knaves, I never have a chance!" she was saying, in a shrill, querulous voice, as Leach announced "Captain Hope."

Miss Yaldwin rose, bowed, and blushed, but remained dumb.

"Who is it, Rose?" inquired her grandmother, screwing up her eyes; "the young man about the clocks? Why does Leach show him in here? Tell him to sit in the hall."

"Grandmamma," said the girl, hastily applying her lips to the ear-trumpet, "it is Captain Hope, Mrs. Baggot's nephew."

"The Pope sent a parrot, to *who's* nephew?" shrieked the deaf lady, who, when she did not quite catch a sentence, took a perverse delight, in assuming that it was ridiculous.

"Mrs. Baggot's nephew!" reiterated the girl with laboured distinctness.

"Oh, oh, indeed!" nodding affably to Roger. "Glad to see you," she chirruped. "We never have young men calling now, since Jane was married; there is no inducement, and I did not understand, for I'm rather near-sighted, and a little hard of hearing"—putting up her ear-trumpet expectantly—"Eh! what did you say?"

In point of fact, he had not opened his lips, but he now, like an inexperienced operator, bawled into the trumpet as if he was drilling a battalion, "It's a beautiful day?"

Mrs. Yaldwin almost leapt into the air.

"You must not raise your voice," explained Rose ; "it frightens her."

"I am awfully sorry ; what on earth am I to do ?"

"Tell her so—but in your usual tone."

After a most ample apology, had been poured into the ear-trumpet, he turned to the younger lady and said :

"Your grandfather has invited me in to see his foreign stamps—I believe he has a wonderful collection."

"Yes," rather timidly ; "he is very proud of it. He will be here immediately." Then ensued a silence. After casting about in his mind, for some appropriate topic, Roger noticed a small, short-haired, grey terrier, looking at him with wistful brown eyes, as much as to say, "I wonder if you are a friend or not ?"

"Is this your dog ?" snapping his fingers, as a signal of good will.

"Yes ; I have had him about three months."

"He is a pretty little fellow, but has rather a cowed, frightened look."

"He was a lost dog, and perhaps that accounts for it ! I noticed him several days, running up and down beside a tram, which passes near here. His master must have got out, and forgotten him ; and the poor dog kept faithfully with the tram, for two

days, and then he was very weak and starved, and I saw him lying near the wall—by the gate, and some boys took him, and were carrying him off to drown him, and I ran out, and bought him, for six-pence."

She paused abruptly, as if rather ashamed of having said so much.

She was certainly, an uncommonly pretty girl, thought Roger, as he stroked the dog's head, and listened to his history ; how her colour went and came—what eyelashes and eyes—and even her shabby black dress, became her to perfection. She was remarkably fair to look upon—and very shy.

"And what do you call your purchase?" he asked.

"I call him Jack. I tried a great many names, and he seemed to know that."

Another interval, and then Roger opened a new subject :

"Do you ever play tennis?" he inquired.

"Go to the devil," shouted a loud gruff voice—the voice of General Yaldwin. Captain Hope started, looked round and noticed close behind him, in a cage ; a Hill Mynar, with its glossy black coat, yellow ears, and bill, and impudent eye—a familiar Indian bird.

"Does he generally join in the conversation?" he asked, after a momentary pause.

"I am sorry to say, he does," admitted Rose, with a smile. "He talks a great deal too much, and imitates everything he hears—and——"

She was rudely interrupted by the sound of a smacking kiss, and an agonized treble, saying: "Thomas! I'll tell the master."

"Have you had him long?" continued Roger, with a desperate effort, to preserve his gravity.

"Grandpapa has had him for years; he brought him from India, and is very fond of him, though sometimes he says he will give him away."

"Do you care for birds?"

"I'm not sure — I don't know much about them."

"Idiot!" exclaimed the mynar in an angry key; "idiot!—get out of my sight."

"I can't say much for the manners of this specimen," remarked Roger; "otherwise, he would be invaluable at a dinner party to fill up long conversational gaps——;" he stopped confusedly as he suddenly realized the fact, that the mynar had rather distinguished himself in this line, on the present occasion.

"Please, would you mind talking to grand-mamma," urged Miss Yaldwin timidly; "you see she is holding up her trumpet."

Captain Hope instantly obeyed; putting his lips to the instrument, he said:



"You seem to have, a wonderful bird here, ma'm."

"Wonderful girl! oh! she's not bad as girls go; she might be worse, and she might be better; girls are a horrible responsibility; but I must say Rose gives no trouble."

"Idle, insolent, underhand, hussy!" shrieked the fatal bird, then coughed and expectorated: "You deserve to starve, miss—to starve—"; putting his head close to the bars, he gobbled incoherently about "temper, devils, blazes, and hell," and finally screamed: "Go to your room—go to your room!"

"Cholum!" exclaimed his victim rising, in great confusion, "you are too tiresome, and this is one of your bad days; I shall have to take you away. Strange voices always upset him," she explained to the visitor apologetically, as she took him down. Roger politely relieved her of the cage, and whilst he bore him out of the room, the irrepressible mynar repeated:

"Idle, scheming, lying minx! go to the devil, get out of my sight," and then he mimicked Rose's clear voice:

"Coming, coming, grandpapa."

Just as the little procession reached the door, it was flung wide open, by the general himself.

"Oh, Hope; how d'ye do?" he said genially. "I am sorry, I have been detained, but I was just

finishing an article on early Roumanian issues, for this afternoon's post. This rascal been at his old tricks, eh? It's lucky he talks Hindostani, isn't it? Some of his remarks, are not fit for ears polite."

(Roger wished from the bottom of his heart, that the bird *had* confined himself, to a foreign tongue.)

"Just put him on the table, like a good fellow, and he will be choop enough; he hates the hall," continued the master of the house. "He is a valuable specimen. I got him from Nepaul. He has the most human voice, I ever heard. My bearer used to say, he was the evil spirit of some sahib; and I have often felt tempted to wring his neck—only he is an old friend, and an amusing beggar. Well, come along now, and make up for lost time," and he hurried him into his sanctum. The study was a primly luxurious room, with easy-chairs, book-cases, a turkey carpet, and fine writing table; there were a few maps, and old Indian arms arranged upon the walls, and in the corner, stood a large glass cupboard in which Roger's keen eye, detected rows of glossy hats. A special table, was entirely dedicated to stamps; there were scissors, gum pots, and piles of books, and magazines. "This is my Album number one," said the general, seating himself with a happy sigh, and waving his visitor, into a chair;

"I compiled it myself," proudly displaying, an enormous leather portfolio.

There were evidently three other volumes, crammed full, and Roger's heart failed within him, for he could see, that his host intended to fulfil his promise most conscientiously, and to post him up thoroughly, as he had threatened.

"Now let us commence," said General Yaldwin. "Bring your chair up, so that we can hold the book comfortably between us. Before proceeding to examine it, I should make you acquainted with a few facts, and explain several small, but important matters. I suppose you know nothing, of water marks?"

"Nothing," repeated the visitor in a hopeless voice.

"It is an essential subject in stamp collecting. Each country has a different sign. England has a crown, India an elephant's head, Egypt a pyramid, Naples a fleur-de-lis, and so on. Then perforation. Have you any knowledge of *that*?"

As Roger expressed absolute ignorance, the general made the most of the occasion, and held forth on ordinary and roulette perforation, for the space of ten minutes. At last, he evidently considered his pupil sufficiently qualified to gaze upon his treasures, and opening the album, he said, in the voice of a man delivering a lecture, "I begin, as you

perceive, with Mulready's blue envelope, on Indian paper—*very* rare, the ordinary ones are common ; I believe you can get one for twenty-five shillings, a black and blue one, of course. Here," indicating with a well-trimmed finger-nail, "is one of the very first penny stamps ever issued ; I got it quite by chance, in an old ironmonger's shop in Worthing." Yes, it was plain, that he was going to do, and did do, his worst ; he was about to retail at length, how he had become possessed of each treasure, and what he had paid for it ; no information, would be withheld.

By the time that they were half through the first volume, Roger, was in despair, and his brain, in a whirl of American, and Australian, first issues ; perforations, water marks, and roulettes. He could not stand it any longer ; pushing back his chair, he rose and said :

"Thank you so much ; I'm afraid I have paid you a visitation, I must really not trespass on your time any longer."

"Bless my soul ! you mustn't go yet !" remonstrated the general. "Why, I've scarcely begun you've not seen the best ones, they are in the third book and I'm keeping them as a *bonne bouche* . you've not seen my Finland stamp with the serpentine perforation !"

"Thank you, another time — another day,"

rejoined the unhappy young man, "I have an engagement. I am going out to ride at half-past four; they keep very good nags at the 'Harp.'"

"Going out to ride!" echoed the other, as he reluctantly shut the book. "Won't you find that dull work—all alone? You ought to wait till you know people, and escort some lady, eh?"

"I am going out with my aunt!"

"Bless my soul and body!" exclaimed the general. "Ah, well, I need not be surprised. She is a remarkable woman, and used to sit her horse capitally, and was well up in all the paper chases, in days gone by."

"I am glad to hear you say so, sir," remarked her nephew in a tone of relief, "for she has ordered up a mare known as the Kicker."

"I am not surprised; that woman is afraid of nothing. She has not ridden for some time, but I saw her on a tricycle last summer—between you and me," dropping his voice to a confidential key. "The daughters did not like it. Oh, she is a marvellous person! Would you suppose that she is only a couple of years younger than Mrs. Yaldwin? She has extraordinary spirit and vitality. Well," rising as he spoke, "you must come into the drawing-room and have a cup of tea. The horses have not arrived yet, and I know Mrs. Baggot takes a good while to put on her accoutrements. You will see

a complete transformation," and he grinned sardonically.

As the general and his visitor were about to rejoin the ladies, the visitor was favoured with a glimpse of his host's redoubtable temper—just one short but volcanic explosion. In crossing the hall, they roused up the irrepressible mynar. He was evidently nursing his wrongs, as he rocked himself sullenly to and fro, on his perch. Putting his head on one side, as he descried his master, he bawled :

"Beggar — pauper — devil ! Get out of my sight !"

The general's face became instantly charged with fury, and with a muttered oath, he dashed at the culprit, and shook his cage violently, saying between his clenched teeth, "You mind yourself, you infernal nuisance, or I'll kick you downstairs, as I did the other day, cage and all."

The mynar simply yawned, scratched his ear comfortably with his left leg, and made no reply.

"Upon my honour, Hope, I often feel inclined to *roast* that bird !" said the general, who was evidently a little ashamed of his outbreak. "But you don't know the provocation he gives me ; he is enough to drive a man wild." He turned round and glared fiercely at the mynar, who remained dumb, and was apparently buried in his own reflec-

tions ; perhaps thinking, of his native hills, his family home in far Nepaul—and a certain, delicious little patch, of wild raspberries ?

“He is choop enough now, he is afraid of me,” boasted his master triumphantly, as he turned to open the drawing-room door. Ere they entered, Roger distinctly heard the mynar exclaim, in the shrill accents, of an impudent street *gamin* :

“Gunpowder Yaldwin ! Gunpowder Yaldwin !”

Fortunately for him, the general's hearing was not what it once had been, and therefore the insult passed unnoticed.

The tea-table was spread, and Captain Hope seated himself beside it, and gladly accepted a cup from Miss Yaldwin's fair hands. He watched her dainty fingers, wielding sugar-tongs, and buttering scones for her grandmother, and not forgetting to administer tit-bits to Jacky.

“I'm sure, he has been accustomed to good society,” observed Rose, as she caught the young man's eye. “He is so wonderfully punctual at afternoon tea.”

“Yes,” assented her grandfather, “and he has been accustomed to be severely washed, and scrubbed, for you have only to mention one word—the word *bath*, and he tears away to hide ; look at him now.” Jacky, with his tail abjectly lowered, was already at the door.

"Poor Jacky!" called his mistress soothingly. "It's all right, it's not Saturday. Come along, and finish your scone. Even on hearing the word in casual conversation," she explained, "and having no reference to him, he flies; and when I want to get rid of him, instead of saying 'Go out Jacky,' I simply look at him, and say 'bath,' and he vanishes."

"It's his sole accomplishment, and speaks volumes for his habits," sneered the general, who was sipping hot water. "This is a fine thing for the digestion, Hope. I strongly recommend, hot water."

"Thank you sir, but all my life I have been striving to keep out of it."

"I daresay, and found it easy enough; nowadays discipline is so slack; commanding officers, funk responsibility, and are little better than sergeant-majors, or orderly room clerks. The fellow who succeeded me in command, was never happy away from his official forms, and red ink bottle; and his whole interest was centred in the men's socks, and the regimental bakery! In my day we thought of other things," and he gave an involuntary glance, at his own portrait.

Yes, it flattered him unmistakably, he did not look nearly as lantern-jawed and grey, as he actually was—he wore full uniform, his hand was on his



sword, and his breast was covered with medals. "Well, there could be no flattering about *them*," said Roger to himself.

"Did you see the case in the White Cockades, the other day?" resumed the old gentleman. "By George, I'd have broken him, if he had been under me, a rank scrim shanker."

"Yes, but as a rule the days of the Queen's bad bargains are at an end," remarked the officer. "We serve the Empress, in many capacities, and are kept pretty busy."

"I don't know about that."

"But I do," said Captain Hope stoutly. "This year my regiment was split up—half on the plains, and half on the hills; and what with officers sick, at classes, or on leave, we were—and indeed it was our normal state—uncommonly short-handed."

"What do you call short-handed?" snarled the old soldier.

"Well, at one time, I was president of one court-martial, prosecutor in another, besides commanding my company; I had charge of the paymastership, printing press, mess, and coffee shop."

"You must be a smart fellow, if you keep your head among all that," remarked the general.

"Oh, I worried along somehow. I did not mind anything, but being paymaster; I was always afraid

of muddling the accounts, and getting into some awful scrape, with the regimental funds."

Before the words were out of his mouth, Captain Hope saw that he had said the wrong thing—or as he mentally expressed it, put his foot in it, somewhere. The general's face became rigid, and Rose's, the colour of her name, and with the preternatural, and inconvenient, sharpness, of deaf people, Mrs. Yaldwin divined that something was amiss. "What is it?" she demanded in her cracked voice. "What has he been saying?" eagerly tendering her trumpet to Rose.

Roger precipitately seized upon it, and shouted into it: "I was only telling the general, how hard we were worked sometimes."

"My good young man, you will certainly break the drum of my ear!" she protested peevishly. "As to your being hard worked, I don't believe one word of it, not one word!" This little scene, happily bridged over, the previous awful silence, and the general, who had now recovered from whatever had disturbed him, resumed the talk about "shop."

Meanwhile the visitor watched his granddaughter narrowly—whilst the old lady, mumbled to herself, and soaked bread in her tea, and the old gentleman, delivered a long monologue on Russia's dangerous activity in Asia, and the possibility of an advance

on Mershad or Herat. She was knitting a black silk sock—how he wished it was for him! What small hands she had!—he liked to follow her fingers, twinkling in and out, among the needles; her eyes were cast down, her lashes swept her cheeks, her face was thin and sad; from his heart he pitied her—this girl who was passing the spring of her days, her youth, that never would come back—the very best of her life—bound hand and foot, to these two old people. *Why* should he be so sorry for her? as Annie had inquired. Would he have been equally interested, if she had had a pasty face, and turned-up nose? He was almost afraid, to ask himself the question.

"It is twenty minutes past four," he said, looking at his watch and rising, "I must be off."

"He is going to ride with his aunt," explained the general, down the ear-trumpet. "What do you say to that, Sara?"

"To hide with his aunt?" she screamed, and a flash of happy expectancy, suddenly shone in her dull old eyes. "Why, what, has she been doing *now*?"

"*Ride!*" he roared. "Ride, I said. I declare she gets deafer every day."

"Oh!" in a key of intense disappointment, "you don't say so? Providence is very good to some people. She is a wonder, only four years younger

than I am, and she rides on horseback, and I go in a bath-chair—and only four years between us!”

Mrs. Yaldwin was much too fond of repeating this intelligence, to please her volatile, and robust contemporary, and the worst of it was, that it was true!

“You will come in again, and we will go on with the stamps?” said the general hospitably. “Come some morning before twelve, I want to show you my rare Finland specimen, and others.”

Roger glanced swiftly at Miss Yaldwin, and declared, that nothing would give him greater pleasure.

“Ah,” said his host, escorting him to the hall door, “if I only had a Blue Natal of ’57 to exhibit, my ambition, would be fulfilled.”

A Blue Natal stamp! a little square of soiled paper, the crowning point of a man’s existence; and this man, had been distinguished; had had a career out in the world, had led men bravely, and worn some hard-won laurels, had gained honours, decorations and fame—and now his horizon was changed; he no longer saw a V.C. dangling before his eyes—all his yearnings, pointed to a Blue Natal stamp!

## CHAPTER VI.

"I AM NOT A MARRYING MAN."

"Here comes the Lady."

THE horses were fidgetting outside the gate, and Captain Hope was waiting in the garden, when at last his aunt appeared, tripping jauntily down the steps—at least he presumed that it was his aunt, but she was so successfully transformed, that she looked like another person—a woman of about five and twenty years of age.

Mrs. Baggot wore a fashionable habit, with a smart waistcoat and tie; a massive roll of auburn hair supported a neat pot hat; her features were but dimly visible, through a thick white veil. In one hand she carried a pretty little hunting crop; with the other, she held up her habit, and generously displayed, a pair of natty patent leather riding boots.

"Well, here I am at last!" she exclaimed, "and dying for a good spin."

What kind of talk was this for an old lady—only the lady did not *look* old—and the remark had evidently been framed, for the benefit of a highly incensed daughter, who accompanied her mother to the gate, with a cloud on her face and a pocket-

handkerchief over her head, and who cast various anxious glances, at neighbouring windows, and up and down the road.

"You need not look so agitated, my dear Annie," continued her parent. "I am not going to risk my pension, and my precious neck—if I can help it. Ah, there are all the Strattons, and there is Mrs. Lifford," nodding, and kissing her hand, in her most airy manner.

"Yes; absolutely courting notice," as Annie mentally remarked, with stifled exasperation.

In another minute, Annie's mamma, looking marvellously young and sprightly, was moving down the road, sitting squarely in her saddle, as if she was well aware of the dozens of eyes, that were gazing after her, in incredulous amazement.

Mrs. Baggot elected to ride towards the country, and it soon became evident to her agonized companion, that the Kicker, was just as much, if not a little more, than she could manage. Doubtless, her hands and seat were good, but her wind and nerve were not what they had been, and when the mare shied violently at a laundry basket, and frisked across the road, Mrs. Baggot became purple in the face, and nearly lost her hat; Roger began to feel vastly uncomfortable. It was a novel, and somewhat overpowering experience, to be compelled to ride with, and look after, a woman who was

more than thirty years his senior. Supposing, the brute she was riding, bolted, and threw her, and she came to grief? Everyone, would be down on him, and say that he had inveigled his old aunt, into making a fool of herself, that she had rashly accompanied him out riding, and, as a not surprising result, had broken her neck! If she would only change horses, he would remove the saddles like a shot; but he dared not propose such a thing. The conversation, thanks to the antics of the Kicker, was broken up into short and jerky sentences, and Mrs. Baggot secretly marvelled, as to what had made her usually cheery nephew, so glum and unresponsive, and why he rode beside her, in such affectionate proximity.

A prolonged trot, subdued the brown mare's exuberant impulses; it also brought her far into the country lanes, and the mare's rider now looked thoroughly at home on her back, and though hot and breathless, was literally bubbling over with high spirits. How strange, and upside down, the world seemed to her nephew! here, was a hearty old lady of sixty, cantering gaily beside him, and yonder, was a girl of nineteen, knitting socks in a stuffy room, with a roaring fire, and sand-bags sealing every aperture. By all the laws of nature, their positions ought to be reversed!

"How I do enjoy a ride," panted his aunt. "I've

not ridden for two years, and I don't mind confessing, that my habit is just a *thought* tight. The last time I wore it, I had a splendid scamper on the sands at Scarborough. I went out with old Colonel Whympier, and we recalled the grand old days, when we hunted with the same Bobbery pack, years ago, at Bareilly. Oh, what a terrible thing it is to grow old, and to retain all the tastes of one's youth, and the same keen desire for them, as when one was twenty. Take my advice, Roger, and keep young, as long as you can ; there is nothing in this world, that compensates for our youth. We think it will never come to an end, and we least value it while it lasts !"

"I am sure you have made the most of yours, Aunt Polly."

"Perhaps so. But I would give six months, of my present age, gladly, in exchange for six days of —days that are no more: say a winter morning on the plains ; to hear the ayah's sleepy voice, saying, 'Mem Sahib, char-tiar hye,' and find my tea beside me ; then the getting into my habit, and going out and finding my game little bay horse, Tom-boy, saddled and awaiting me at the steps ; the exhilarating feel of the fresh, sharp air ; the delight of the first canter ; the greetings of friends, on their way to the meet ; the find ; the run ; the ride home. Ah, you lucky, lucky boy ! you have it



all before you still, and I can only look backwards," and she sighed profoundly. "I rarely ride now, but I thought I would like a little turn with you, and I do enjoy Annie's scandalized attitude; her expression is delicious—as entertaining as a screaming farce. She never could ride, not even in her teens.

"Indeed; then she did not take after you," remarked Roger.

"No. I used to be positively ashamed to be seen with her; she looked like a pillow tied in the middle. Oh, how stiff I shall be to-morrow! and what a mouth this brute has! I wish to goodness she would not chuck her head about."

"Ride her on the snaffle," suggested Roger, "and then I expect she will go all right."

"What an exquisite autumn afternoon it is!" remarked his aunt presently. "How glad I am that I am out enjoying it, instead of sitting at home, enduring visits from dozens of women, who can talk of nothing but their servants, and their nursery. There is Mrs. Fawcett at number nineteen; when I see her coming I fly, and leave her to Annie; her only subject, is her children. She insists on telling everyone, what they wear, indoors and out of doors, and in bed; what they eat; when they cut their teeth, and when, they began beef tea!"

"I don't wonder that you bolt."

"No; but properly speaking, I ought to sit it out, and listen with enjoyment, and offer valuable advice, like other old women of my age; but, unfortunately, I have never learnt to grow old gracefully—indeed, to grow old at *all*; and more shame for me, say my contemporaries; but my sympathies are entirely with the young; my heart is still in its teens, and it is not my fault, that I have been blessed with a splendid constitution, and an evergreen temperament!"

"No, Aunt Polly, on the contrary, it is your good fortune."

"I certainly have retained my health, and my nerves most marvellously," giving the Kicker a smart slash of her whip. "I took good care of myself, long ago, and never worried—that's the main thing. When the cook got drunk, the night of a dinner-party, I simply borrowed my neighbour's *chef*. When my new box of dresses, went to Calcutta by mistake, and I could not go to the grand fancy ball, I bore it calmly—and did not take to my bed, as did a fellow sufferer; and even when young Dawkins jilted Clara—and her *trousseau* ordered, and we lost ten thousand rupees, in the Poggieporre bank, I did not succumb; nor did I fret, because Annie never had an offer. I took things quietly,

and I was always for peace—peace at home, and peace abroad.”

“Peace at any price!’ is that your motto, Aunt Polly?”

“Well, no; but I kept out of all great social wars. I was even a neutral in the grand campaign about the Moghu! Serai Book Club; and if your uncle liked to play whist, as he did every day, from four till eight, at rupee points, and a gold mohur on the rub, and came home a little short in his temper at times; I never took any notice; men are but mortal!”

“And women?”

“The same—though people here, are good enough to call *me*, immortal! My enjoyment of life—my energy and activity—does not tally with my age. I am sixty-one this month, and feel as if I could walk miles, or could dance all night; isn’t it shocking! I sleep like a child, and never have occasion to call in a doctor. I am positive, the medical profession will insist on having a *post-mortem* on me, when I die; to try and discover, how it was done! Just as I once—fired by the same spirit of research—investigated a doll, who opened and shut her eyes.

“Is not that a pretty place in the trees?” she asked, suddenly giving the conversation, an abrupt turn.

"Yes; who lives there?"

"An old sailor—an Admiral Godwin—a charming man: he always had a pleasant houseful, for he has a huge family of married sons and daughters. The last time I saw him he was just off to meet a daughter who was returning from foreign parts, with three children, a nurse, a wild orphan girl found in a deserted village, two yellow cockatoos, and an armadillo!"

"I think, I should have dispensed with the orphan, and the armadillo. How would your good neighbour, the general, have received a similar consignment?"

"My dear Roger, what a preposterous suggestion!"

"I suppose he would have boarded the cockatoos with the mynar?"

"He would have boarded them *all* out: he has no family affection; the great stamp tribe, possesses his entire heart. That is to say, if he has a heart. Can you picture him a young man, flirting with Mrs. Yaldwin?"

"No," exploded Roger with a loud laugh, "but I suppose she had no ear-trumpet in those days?"

"Of course not. Fancy having to breathe soft nothings into that receptacle! She was a remarkably pretty woman, and they say Rose has a look of her—O, what she was, I mean."

"Who says so?" inquired her nephew incredulously,

"Well, she says so *herself*. Do you wish for better authority? Ah, there are the Garnets!" as a carriage-full of people rolled by, staring hard, and returning Mrs. Baggot's beaming nods, and smiles, after quite a noticeable delay.

"Positively they did not know me! They thought I was some girl, you were escorting. Oh, how amusing! Where were we? What were we talking about?" she continued with animation.

"Of our next-door neighbours, as usual," replied her nephew promptly.

"Oh, yes. By the way, I forgot to ask before—I suppose you saw, all the general's stamps?"

"Only a few of them—merely a couple of thousand or so; I am to go again."

"Good gracious, my dear boy, you don't mean it! Either he has taken a fancy to you, or"—she paused significantly—"you have taken a fancy—well—not to *him*!"

"Oh, it's all right, Aunt Polly; he has taken a fancy to *me*. Surely you are not surprised at that. Eh?"

"He does not often, take to young men," remarked Mrs. Baggot in a dubious tone. "And unless you ply him with plenty of army news, and rare specimens, I warn you, that your reign, will be short!"

"I suppose I can last out ten days?" returned Roger, with composure.

"Don't talk of ten days! You are booked to me till Christmas, and who knows what may happen by *that* time?" with a playful flourish of her whip.

"By that time, I shall probably find myself in a horse-box, on the main deck, of one of Her Majesty's Indian troopers," said Captain Hope.

"Not you! You will eat your Christmas dinner with us, and help Clara to hang the mistletoe, and get up games. You won't know Clara; she is far better-looking than when she was younger. She is immensely admired now; she knows how to put on her clothes, and has very taking manners."

"What do you mean by taking manners, Aunt Polly?"

"You know perfectly. A pretty way of getting, and taking, all she wants. She has such taste. I only wish, poor dear, that her income was in keeping with it; and that reminds me, to tell you, what you would never guess. General Yaldwin is a wealthy man; he is rich, though he keeps no carriage, and prefers to walk, or, better still, to wrangle with fly men. He rarely entertains, though he keeps a professed cook. He must be saving enormous sums; he owns a quantity of house property. I am sorry to say he is my landlord, and a bad one; he won't

do anything. I want a new kitchen range, but he will not listen to the idea."

"Why don't you bribe him with rare stamps?"

"Because they would cost as much as the new range, or more, my clever Roger. Oh, yes, undoubtedly the old gentleman, has a large fortune; though I don't quite know how he came by it."

"Loot," suggested her nephew briefly.

"No, he was later, than those golden days. Although he is so crazed about stamps, he is exceedingly sane about shares, and has the eye of a hawk, for a nice investment, or a shaky concern. He has given me no end of tips, and they have all turned out well. When I said that he would leave everything to Jane Randall, his daughter, you know, I was not serious. Of course, Rose will have a comfortable sum; so if you are turning your thoughts that way——"

"But I am *not*," protested her listener. "I am not a marrying man."

"You admire her, though?"

"I admire her, certainly. I admire her, as I admire any other beautiful object; as, for instance, I admire Milan Cathedral. She is equally lively, and equally cold."

"You say this to put me off. You are sorry for her, Roger."

"And if I am, Aunt Polly, what of that?"

"If you are," poking him playfully with her hunting crop, "we need say no more. You know the axiom, about love, and pity."

"Yes; and I must insist on saying something more. I declare most solemnly, that you are entirely mistaken."

"There, there, that will do! I cannot allow you to perjure yourself. Come, let us be getting on; we are dining at the Gascoignes'; perhaps I shall be too stiff to move, and you will have to escort me over there, on an hospital stretcher," and, with a laugh, she broke into a smart trot.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### A MIDNIGHT MEETING.

"'Tis all men's office to speak patience."

—*Much Ado About Nothing.*

A FEW days later, Roger hope began seriously to ask himself, "*Was* he turning his thoughts that way?" as his aunt had expressed it; what was there, about this silent, shabby, Miss Yaldwin, that had such an extraordinary fascination for him? He had met numbers of other girls—pretty, well-dressed, bright, and charming—and some of them ready to charm him; he encountered them daily at at dances, tennis, and dinner-parties; there was Miss Compton, with her satin skin, flashing teeth,



bright eyes, and bare shoulders; the two Miss Fishers, co-heiresses; Miss Montara, with her Spanish beauty, and French toilettes. And yet—agreeable as they were, accomplished, and merry, and much as he enjoyed their society—they all faded from his mental vision, as soon as he had quitted their company, and there rose up before him, only the picture of a girl, with tragic eyes, dressed in a shabby black gown—in fact, it was one of her grandmother's, cut down, to suit her figure.

“What the dickens did he see in her?” he asked himself angrily, as he walked home one night, from a bachelor's dinner at the club, smoking a final cigar.

Miss Yaldwin was pretty, certainly; silent and reserved, even stupid; she never seemed to have any conversation; it was all desperately up-hill, work, on his side, and she was not in the least amusing! She did not ride, or play tennis, or even the banjo. She had seen nothing of the world, and never made the most feeble attempt to entertain him; in fact, she scarcely seemed, to take the trouble to look at him. Once or twice, he and Annie had encountered her, and the general, and although he had walked with her, for half-a-mile or so, he had never advanced an inch in her acquaintance. He admired her reserve, for one thing; she spoke of her own life, and surroundings, as if they were a matter of course

—everything they ought to be, and as if she was in the enjoyment, of all the pleasant things, common to other young people. She never read novels, he gathered ; had never been inside a theatre, or to a ball, and had no girl friends in Morpingham. This had been the poor result, of two weeks' acquaintance, and dozens of questions (on his side) ; on her part, she never put one query, and did not appear to take the smallest interest in him, or his concerns ; he might be a married man, a deaf mute, or a stuffed figure, for all she seemed to care. He had gleaned one or two other trifles : namely, that she was extremely proud, and that she was fond of painting.

Proud, and pretty, and fond of painting ; was this the sort of girl, he would like to marry ? No, especially as she did not care a rap about him. She had no merry glances, and greetings, for him ; he would as soon look for them, from a marble statue ; he was an unutterable idiot, to think of her, and yet sometimes there was an expression of dumb despair, in those grey eyes of hers, that haunted him, and gave him no peace ; he was always longing to look into them again ; but instead of gazing into Miss Yaldwin's eyes, to verify a wild idea, he was compelled to give his close attention, to the general's stamps—and more than once, he had cursed them from the bottom of his heart.

The Mall, near the Botanic Gardens, is wide, and boasts of a long paved crossing, which starts from a letter box, and is illuminated at either end, by a somewhat dim street lamp. Captain Hope was half-way across, when he noticed a girl coming straight towards him ; she was walking fast, with her head bent down ; nevertheless, by the light of the lamp, as she passed under it, he had instantly recognised Rose Yaldwin. Had his thoughts summoned her to the spot ? She carried a small bag in one hand, and something bulky under her arm, and gave a violent start when he accosted her ; he had been on the shady side of the road, and she evidently had not recognized him, till they were almost face to face.

"Good evening—or rather good morning—Miss Yaldwin !" he said cheerily.

"Oh, Captain Hope ! is it you ?" she gasped, in a shaky voice. "Good night ; please don't detain me," and she was about to hurry by.

"Are you looking for a doctor ? Can I not help you ?" he asked. "Is any one ill ?"

"No ;" and she once more attempted to pass, but he deliberately prevented her, by stretching his arm out to bar the way.

Her excited air, her haste, her half-sobbing sentences, all assured him, that there was something very wrong.

"Tell me," he persisted ; "are you in any trouble, Miss Yaldwin ? I am sure, you are ?"

"Why should I tell my troubles to a stranger ?" she answered sharply. "How dare you detain me ? Be good enough, to allow me to pass."

"Yes—on one condition ; tell me where you are going, please."

No answer.

"Why are you out at this hour alone ?" he continued. "I believe you are about to do something rash ; I shall not leave you."

"Then, Captain Hope, I appeal to you as a gentleman."

"Yes, I trust, I am a gentleman."

"I implore you—I beseech you—not to delay me in this manner, and to keep my secret."

"Certainly," he replied, "you may rely upon me, as if I were your brother."

"My brother !" and she gave a wild, hysterical sort of laugh. "Well then, listen ; I am running away from home !"

After an appreciable pause, during which he mentally remarked, "I thought as much ! and so she *has* a spice of the devil in her, after all !" he said, in his most persuasive tone :

"And, won't you tell *me* where you are going ?"

"You will swear to keep it a secret ?"

"Of course," he answered, curtly.

"I am going to a schoolfellow—in Paris."

"And does she expect you?"

"No; I shall wire. I intend to catch the three o'clock up express. I shall breakfast in London, and arrive in Paris, to-morrow evening."

"I see; you have it all cut and dry. The three o'clock express, is not due for the next two hours," he objected. "There is a nice bench over there, on the footway, under the lime trees; let us sit down, and wait, and talk things over quietly."

"Wait here in St. Chadwick's Road!" she repeated, rather scornfully. "No, thank you; I am going straight to the railway station."

"Then so am I," rejoined Roger, with an air of great determination. "I shall certainly see you off."

"Captain Hope!" she exclaimed despairingly, "I entreat you, to go away and *leave* me."

"I will, at the station; or here, if I have not prevailed upon you, to change your mind and go back."

"Go back?" she echoed; "you do not know, what you are saying!"

"Please allow me to carry your bag," he said; "and what is that bundle under your cloak? Hullo! it is alive!"

"It is only Jacky. I could not leave him behind. I could not get rid of him; even the

word 'Bath' was useless ; he suspected me, and squeezed out after me, when I was shutting the door."

"Now here is the bench ; please sit down. The train does not go for ages ; and permit me to suggest, that Jacky should sit also ; your arm must ache. Come, Jacky, you clever little detective !" and he took possession of all her property, whilst the girl sat down, and leant her face on her hands, in a hopeless attitude. Here was indeed, the most extraordinary situation, in which Roger Hope had ever found himself (and he had not been without some queer experiences, in his life of twenty-nine years) : sitting under the lime trees, on the deserted Mall, with a runaway girl, a dog, and a bag, at half-past one o'clock in the morning ! By the dim grey light, he could barely distinguish her figure, as she sat with her head bent forward, and buried in her hands. Her self-control had evidently abandoned her, and he could hear her sobbing — broken, long-drawn, sobs.

What would the general say, if he discovered them ? He almost laughed aloud, at the mental vision—but this was really no laughing matter ; he must do his best, to talk her over ; or at least, find out her reasons, for this insane step. For some time, the girl's repressed sobs, and the faint tramp, of a distant policeman on his beat, were the only sounds

that broke the silence. Then a clock chimed half-past one, and Roger said :

"Come, Miss Yaldwin ; before you go further, or too far to draw back, I beg of you to think seriously of what you are doing."

"I have thought of it," she answered doggedly—"thought of it for months."

"Indeed—and who is your friend ?"

"She is a French girl—an artist—who lives in Paris ; her name is Marie Polté. We were at the same school, for several years. I can paint, and earn my own living too."

"That is more than most young ladies can say ; and your friend, I conclude, is married ?"

"Oh dear, no ! she is only my age and as poor as myself ; she copies in the Louvre. I can copy too. We will manage."

"May I venture to ask, if you have any money ?"

"A little," she replied, hesitatingly ; "enough for my fare."

"Miss Yaldwin, to me, this scheme savours of insanity ! Of course, I do not know your reasons for leaving home, but they must be very strong ones, to justify such a step."

"They are strong—*very* strong," she answered, sharply.

"I do not ask for your confidence—I should not presume to do so—and I am rather a duffer at

giving advice ; but I am ten years older than you are, and I have knocked about the world a bit, and I know, what a rough time you will have, if you carry out your plan. You have been brought up in a sheltered home, and in comfort. You are in some respects, a mere child, and the idea of your going off to Paris, of all places, to seek your fortune along with a girl as young and penniless as—— Good Lord !” he burst out passionately, “it is not to be thought of.”

“But when I assure you, that it *has* been thought of,” she rejoined defiantly.

“Have you no other friends ?”

“No ; not one,” still more defiantly.

“Then let me talk to you as if I were—say, your brother ; quite honestly, and plainly, and perhaps rudely ; forget that I am Mrs. Baggot’s nephew, and believe one thing firmly : that I have no object before me but your good. This sounds exactly, as if I was some old woman, lecturing you—but I really *am* in earnest.”

“Captain Hope, you are extremely kind ; and now in the dark, where I cannot see you, I could almost fancy, that you were Hubert. I believe Hubert, would say the same as you do.”

“Hubert !” (the name gave her listener an unpleasant shock)—“and what is he to you ?”

“He is my brother—have I not said so ?—my



only brother ; and we are quite alone in the world."

"Then when you admit, that your brother, would think as I do—think you wrong, in suddenly leaving your home—why do you go?" This, he flattered himself, was a sound argument.

"Oh, *why*?" with a quick gesture of impatience ; "in that case, I would have to tell you everything."

A long pause, during which she thoughtfully surveyed, through the grey dusk, the young man—Mrs. Baggot's nephew—where he sat at the end of the form, with his hat pushed off his forehead, nursing Jacky—who, unaccustomed to these late hours, was fast asleep.

"I think I may trust you," she said at last ; "you are fond of dogs, and you have honest eyes."

"This is something, at least!" said the young man to himself.

"Yes, I will tell you everything," continued his companion excitedly.

"To-morrow," he added, starting to his feet, much to Jacky's disgust ; "meanwhile, allow me, to take you home."

"Home!" and she laughed ; it was something between a laugh and a sob. "No, no! I am not at all certain that I shall ever go there again ; and if you wish to hear me at all, you must listen to me NOW."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### "IF GRANDPAPA COULD SEE ME NOW!"

"Think you I find no bitterness at all,  
No burden to be borne like Christian's pack?  
Think you there are no ready tears to fall,  
Because I keep them back?"

—CELIA THAXTER.

"THEN, in that case, had we not better walk up and down?" suggested Captain Hope. "It is getting chilly, and you may catch cold."

She rose obediently; and presently they were rapidly pacing the Mall, whilst sleepy Jacky jogged along disconsolately in their wake.

"I only wish I could," she broke out abruptly.

"Could what, Miss Yaldwin? go home? There is nothing simpler!"

"No—catch cold and die," she answered fiercely.

"Oh, come! you oughtn't to say that."

"I can say worse—*much* worse. I know, before I have done, you will think me a horrible girl; you will never speak to me again, but I cannot help that. Listen," she continued impressively. "I have often thought of the pond in these Botanic Gardens, only for those horrible green weeds—they put me off, and I have done *this* before."

"What?" he ejaculated, coming to a momentary halt.

"Yes," she resumed triumphantly; "but I only got as far as the steps. Once I put my things in this bag, and came down to the hall door, and opened it, and looked out; but there were some drunken men passing, and I dared not venture; but to-night I dared!"

She spoke so hurriedly, and with such a force of repressed excitement, that Roger found it impossible to realize, that this girl with rapid utterance, and angry gestures, who was tearing along at a pace that would have amazed a bystander, was the self-same, cold, inanimate, young lady, who gave him such haughty, and nonchalant answers, less than twenty-four hours ago.

"Yes," she continued breathlessly, "I may as well tell you that my life is a burden to me; I keep my feelings to myself as much as possible, but sometimes they blaze out in spite of me, and I answer grandpapa. His cold, stern, tyranny, enrages me; his persistent carping at trivial things, maddens me; and I *fight* with him—yes, I do! for I have a temper too. He hates me, and I am sure he feels sometimes as if he could kill me."

"But surely——" began Roger

"Please hear me to the end," she interrupted impatiently. "I am going to tell you, everything,

before the cold fit comes on—our disgrace, and all. Yes, if grandpapa could hear me, and see me now, he certainly *would* kill me!"

Captain Hope confessed to himself, that if the general came on them at the present moment, his own life, would be in considerable danger.

"Grandpapa had two children," continued Miss Yaldwin; "Aunt Jane, of whom you have often heard, and my father, whose name is never mentioned. He was a captain in the Scarlet Hussars, a very smart expensive regiment; my mother was a Miss Standish, quite a celebrated beauty, and an heiress; and grandpapa was excessively proud of us in *those* days. I remember them well. I remember India distinctly; the great plains, the long lines of white cavalry barracks, and our big, cool, bungalow, with its matted floors. I remember our ponies, and ayah, and bearers; and the regimental drag—and mother's open carriage. Our house seemed always full of people; there were continual guests, and dinners, and tiffins. Then came a change; I can't describe it precisely. Father was queer and restless, and mother often cried, and had headaches; but he still kept race-horses, and she still entertained. Then we went to the hills, to a lady who took children—to a pretty out-of-the-way place, where we remained a long time. At last my mother joined us, but she seemed

quite altered, and ill. Her pretty rings and bangles were gone, and she told us, that we were now very poor; all her fortune had been lost in some bank, which had smashed; and we were going home to England. Before we left the hills, father came up to take leave of us; I recollect him well—he looked so much older, and graver—and his kissing me, and telling me to be a good girl, and desiring Hubert to take care of me *always*. Then we left; we all started the same day, father was going in one direction back to his regiment, and we were bound for Bombay. We halted at the place where our roads parted; it was a native grave, a cairn, or heap of stones, with a little red flag gaily waving on the top of it. I remember him standing looking after us, and waving his hand, till we were out of sight. I can see him as I speak! After a weary sixty mile march down to the plains, carried along sheer precipices, and over rushing rivers, on men's shoulders, we all reached Bombay quite safely—but my father was never seen, or heard of, again."

"Never seen or heard of again?" repeated her companion, incredulously.

"No; not a trace of him. No one had met him; there was a search; large rewards were offered among the hill people, but all in vain. It was believed that he had committed suicide—thrown him-

self over some precipice, or into the bottom of some inaccessible ravine."

"Yes; but perhaps he may have met with an accident."

The girl hastily waved away the interruption, and continued in a choked voice: "And then his affairs were looked into; his money matters were in a fearful state—he had appropriated two or three thousand pounds, belonging to regimental funds or to the mess. He had always been rich, until mother lost her fortune, and he raced and gave dinners, and did not know how to retrench. He was very, very generous, but very weak, and—and he hoped to be able to pay it all back. You—you understand?" she asked rather piteously.

"I understand perfectly."

"Grandpapa made the money good, and the matter was hushed up; but, of course, it could not be forgotten in the regiment; and grandpapa, who was always proud of father, and prouder still of his own name—never got over it—no, *never!*"

"And your mother?"

"We lost her, soon after we came to England. She faded away, and they said it was consumption; but *I* believe, she died of a broken heart. She was very dear to Hubert and me, and oh, how different our lives might have been, had she lived!" She paused, and walked on, in dead silence for some

time. Then she continued : " Hubert is a handsome boy, and clever. Grandpapa liked him, and thought he would retrieve our name, and do him credit. He was sent to Wellington, and then to Sandhurst. He is four years older than I am ; I was at school at Versailles until I was fifteen. It was there I knew Marie Polté ; but I always met Hubert here in the summer holidays, and we were very happy, though grandpapa could never endure *me*. I remind him of my mother, and somehow he never could forgive her for losing her fortune—as if she could help it !—and her people would have nothing to say to us, because of father's disgrace. But he tolerated Hubert, and was proud of him. But Hubert, poor boy, has the family temper ; and one day he arrived from Sandhurst, accompanied by a gentleman, and there was a long conference in the study. I shall *never* forget grandpapa's face when he came out. Hubert had struck an officer, and been expelled. Grandpapa was so infuriated, that he would not even have him in the house. He sent him off to the Harp Hotel, and gave him fifty pounds, and told him to clear out of the country within three days. It was not merely his being expelled, that made grandpapa so wild with rage. The wretched boy, had lost his temper, and said things in a passion—I don't know what—that grandpapa never forgave. So he washed his hands of him four years

ago, forbade me to write to, or see him, which orders I strictly disobey—as far as writing goes."

"And what has become of him?" inquired Roger. "Where is he now?"

"He went to India, believing that he could easily make his way, and get into the police, or the opium department, or the Nizam's force; but he is guard upon a railway in Burmah—think of that—and poor, and in bad health, and friendless. I help him as much as I can."

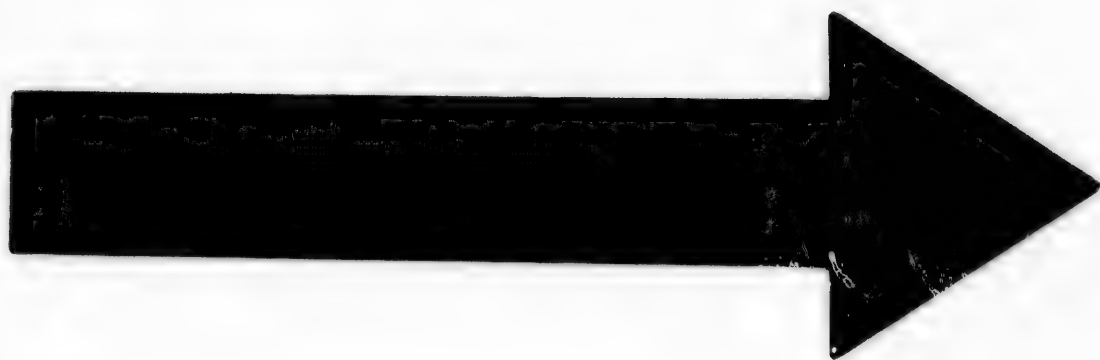
"*You* help him?" exclaimed her astonished listener.

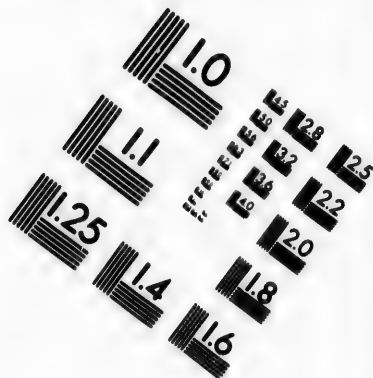
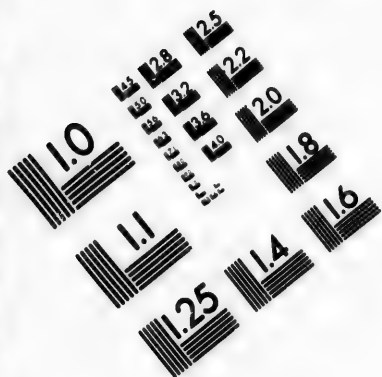
"Yes; I am sure you may well wonder how! I can paint pretty well. I do sketches of animals, and flowers, and I have quite a knack of drawing soldiers. I sell them in a shop here, quite on the sly. Annie assists me, and I send the money to Hubert—sometimes a pound, sometimes as much as five pounds. Grandpapa bought one of my military sketches one day, and brought it home, and said it was capital! He has nailed it up somewhere in his study, and I believe it cost him thirty shillings. He never imagines that *I* did it."

"Or what you do with the money you make?" added her companion, drily.

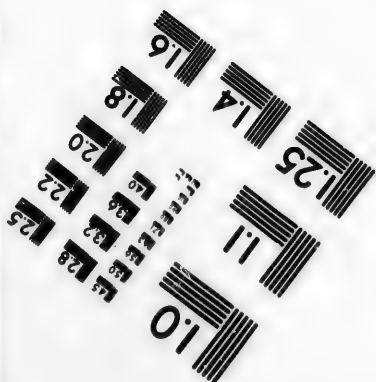
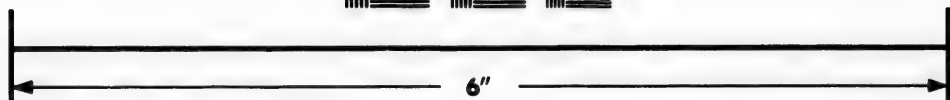
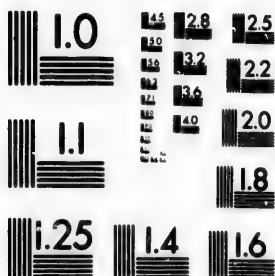
"No; we have fearful rows about Hubert. *He*, is just the one point, I won't yield. He is my brother, and I love him, of course. I would fight







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like a wild cat, for any one I loved ; but I care for very few people, or things. I willingly give up society, amusements—everything grandpapa wishes,—but I will *not* give up Hubert."

"And what does the general say to that?"

"He says I am a young devil! and that he will break my spirit, and that I must, and shall, yield. This evening, he found a letter I had just had from Hubert, and he read it, and discovered that I had been sending money. He stormed, and shouted, and swore, and would not even suffer me to speak! I know the servants heard every word he said—I believe they hung about outside to listen. It is capital fun for *them*! He said, I had stolen the housekeeping money, and was my father's own daughter—a liar, an embezzler, and a thief! Then I flew at him; I raged too; I was beside myself. I scarcely recollect what I said; but I know he told me, that I was not to be trusted with money or honour; that he would send me to a school in Switzerland—a fearful place, where I was once for six months, and nearly went mad. I was to be kept locked up, like some dangerous animal. When he had raved himself perfectly hoarse, he ordered me up to my room. I rushed up, collected my money, packed my trunk, and scrawled a note to grandmamma. Why not? I could not endure the misery of my life any longer, and—and—and——"

"I know the style," said the young man; "to be left on the pin-cushion, and complete in every particular save your address."

"Yes; I told her, that I hoped she would forgive me, and not miss me much; and then I waited until the house was quiet, and—and that's all."

"I suppose, your grandfather often speaks in the heat of passion, and forgets all about it the next day?"

"Yes," she admitted with reluctance.

"And has threatened you before?"

"Oh, yes; over and over again!"

"And nothing came of it so far! Then, Miss Yaldwin, I am sure you will agree with me—that I have only one thing now to do, and that is to take you home."

"But I cannot go back," she rejoined. "I burned my boats, when I closed the door. The other time I only *looked* out."

"I can make that all right; my aunt will give you a bed"—thinking that no doubt, Mrs. Baggot would look leniently on an escapade, she herself had secretly recommended. What would she, and his prim cousin Annie, think, if they could behold him and Rose Yaldwin, posting along the Mall, at two o'clock in the morning? They would scarcely recognize her—the silent girl, who rarely opened her lips—in this fiery young lady, whose words had

come rushing over one another, in such an impetuous, torrent.

"That would be very, very kind of her," replied Rose, "but how could she possibly account for me, in the morning?"

"You might slip in with the milk, like the cats," he answered with a laugh. "But my aunt is a woman of resource, and she can almost account for *anything*. Let us be going on now; it is about two o'clock."

"Captain Hope," said his confederate hesitatingly, "I trust, you are making me do what is best?"

"I know I am, Miss Yaldwin. By this time to-morrow, when all is smooth, and your grandfather has cooled down, you will see that no other course was possible. Imagine you, a stranger, arriving forlorn in Paris, perhaps sharing another girl's earnings—*au cinquième*—struggling to make ends meet, and to live like a lady, amid sordid surroundings—and many other things, you know nothing about. Believe me, to-morrow night—should you wake up—you will be thankful to find yourself under the roof of Holland Gardens, instead of in some pokey apartment, at the back of the Luxemburg. Here, if you have not much variety, you have a comfortable home, and food, and shelter; and things may mend; when they come to the worst, they do, you know."

"Yes, and you have certainly seen the *worst* of *me* to-night. I cannot help it, and I know you must think me a violent, lawless, dreadful, sort of girl, who has given you an immensity of trouble."

"No; I don't think anything of the sort," he answered emphatically.

"At any rate, I am not the least like what I seem in every-day life. You will naturally look upon me as a sort of smothered volcano; you have been extremely kind to me, Captain Hope;" and she stopped abruptly, and added: "I shall always remember this night, and how, in the heat of mad, ungovernable, passion and impulse, I opened all my heart and thoughts to you—an utter stranger. I wish you would promise, to forget all I have said, and once you leave Morpingham, forget my very *name*."

"I promise that not a word you have confided to me, shall ever cross my lips; this talk has made us friends, I hope, has it not?"

"Yes," she assented, rather dubiously, "if you wish."

If he wished!

"And here we are!" he said, opening the gate most carefully, and taking out his latch-key. "Happy, happy thought! would it fit your door?"

"I should not wonder; the houses are exactly

the same, even to the bell-handles. At any rate, I can but try."

"We will both try; and if we succeed, it will simplify matters very much," was his reply.

Like a pair of burglars, they crept up the steps, of No. 13, and after a few gentle pushes--the hall door yielded! This, was a moment of intense thankfulness to Roger Hope; for boldly as he had assured the girl, of its being "all right if he took her to his aunt's," he was not so very confident, that entire success, would attend the arrangement!

With a whispered good-bye, and a hurried handshake, he saw the fair runaway safely within the hall. Jacky slunk in after her. Apparently, he had grasped the situation, and looked a prey to remorse and fear--a conscience-stricken dog. The door was gently closed, and the young man drew a deep sigh of relief, as he cautiously retired from the premises. "That adventure was over, and *well* over," he said to himself, "unless the culprit encountered her grandfather, candle in hand, upon the stairs. These old Indians were light sleepers; but, on the whole, he thought she was now pretty safe; and all's well that ends well."

Wherein Roger Hope, in his premature self-congratulation, somewhat resembled the gentleman who gave a bill at six months in payment of a debt, and then said, "Thank God, that's settled!"



## CHAPTER IX.

### "WAITING UP."

"All are not thieves that dogs bark at."

As Roger was proceeding stealthily upstairs, his aunt's door slowly opened, and a large frilled cap peeped out.

"Roger!" she whispered imperiously, "come in here *directly*, and tell me, what you have been doing?"

Roger obeyed with reluctant resignation. There was a night-light spluttering in a saucer, but a lamp had recently been lit, and by its rays, he discerned Mrs. Baggot, who had retired into a high-backed arm-chair. Her bare feet were thrust into slippers; she wore a scarlet silk wadded dressing-gown, and an enormous nightcap; without her fringe, and side teeth, he scarcely recognized her! her chestnut *toupée* was gone, and she wore her own venerable white hairs, neatly brushed away from an intellectually high forehead. Mrs. Baggot's manner, was as much altered as her appearance. He was unfamiliar with this severe relation, with an alarmingly austere expression; she looked like a

old lady chief justice, sitting in red robes, on a judgment seat.

"Roger, shut the door at once; and come here and tell me what you have been doing?" she reiterated sternly.

"Oh, I've been dining with Saunders at the club; they were playing snookers, and so I could not get away. I'm sorry I'm so late," he rejoined, with the utmost *sang froid*. *He* was not going to let any cats out of bags.

"Sorry you are so late, are you? and I am sorry too! I always heard, that you were a good sort, but one hears many a thing that is not true. I wonder you can stand there, and look at me without a blush on your face!"

"A blush?" he echoed, with a rather exasperating smile. "My dear Aunt Polly, I lost the faculty of blushing, many years ago."

"I don't doubt it," she sneered. "Pray *who* was the girl you brought up to this door just now, and then left at No. 13?"

"By Jove!" he said to himself, "I was afraid of rousing the general, but I never expected anything in this quarter."

"I am a light sleeper," she continued, "and I heard the gate click, and I got up and looked out."

"I wish to goodness you had stayed in your bed, you inquisitive old witch!" he mentally remarked,

as he took a seat, threw open his top coat, and looking his aunt straight between the eyes, said with amazing calmness: "Then I suppose, I must make a clean breast of it."

"I think you will find it the only plan with *me*," she rejoined with overpowering dignity.

"If it concerned myself, it would be no matter—" he began.

"No, of course not; a man may do anything," she snapped.

"But it implicates another," he resumed, as if he had not heard her; "and if I tell you—and I really would as soon tell you, as not—in case of anything coming out after I am gone—will you swear to keep it a secret?"

"Pooh!" she ejaculated. "A secret, indeed! Why, the girl was Rose Yaldwin; I even recognised her dog. Oh! if her grandfather had *seen* her?" tragically casting up eyes and hands.

"Only for me, he ran a very good chance of never seeing her again," was the unabashed retort.

"Oh, really!" with withering sarcasm. "I am sure if he knew, he would be excessively, obliged to you."

"I entirely agree with you," replied her nephew with unflinching composure; "I am sure he would. At about half-past one, I met her crossing the Mall, bag in hand——"

"By appointment?" interrupted Mrs. Baggot, with a scornful flap of her nightcap frills.

It was now Captain Hope's turn to look stern.

"Look here, Aunt Polly," he said, jumping to his feet, but speaking very quietly; "if you think I am a cad, just say so at once—and there is an end of it."

"I beg your pardon, Roger," she replied rather tamely. "Pray go on; I won't interrupt again; sit down."

"I met Miss Yaldwin on the crossing; I recognized her, and accosted her, for I thought by her manner, there was something up; she did her best to shake me off, but it was no go; I stuck to her like a burr, and in spite of her, until she confessed that she was making a bolt of it, and was off to Paris by the up mail."

"To *Paris*?" echoed Mrs. Baggot, in much excitement, now tossing off a slipper.

"Yes; to some girl who lives in the students' quarter, and who copies in the Louvre. At first, she would not listen to reason; but in the end, I persuaded her to sit down quietly on a bench, and give me a hearing. She is just like a child, and knows nothing of the world. I put it all as well as I could, and at last she cooled a bit—she *had* been at a white heat of passion—and she heard me out. Then we walked up and down, whilst she told me

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her story ; although, of course, I stood to my guns, and lectured her, and preached. I could scarcely blame her for running away ; and you once told me, you would do it yourself if you were in *her* shoes. Aunt Polly, that girl is a good girl, and leads less than a dog's life ; you can surely brighten it for her a little."

"Humph ! And so you got her to go back ?"

"Yes ; after no end of jawing and advice. Until to-night, I had no idea of my own eloquence ! At first I decided to bring her to you."

"Good Heavens !" interrupted Mrs. Baggot. "What a deliverance !"

"Yes ; for we discovered that my latch-key fits next door."

"Nonsense !" ridding herself hastily of her remaining slipper.

"Yes ; fits it beautifully, and so I let her in, and the dog too—he sneaked after her, looking as guilty as you please—and all's well that ends well."

"Do you think this is the end of it ?" asked Mrs. Baggot sarcastically.

"Yes ; for, as far as I know—no one saw us."

"My dear boy, *what* an adventure !"

"Well, it was a little embarrassing. If there is a row—but I don't see how there can be one—I am glad you are in the swim, for you can see her through."

"A pleasant little job for me, truly. And pray, how long were you parading about together?"

"More than half an hour, and I never did a better half-hour's work, though I get scowls and a scolding from you; and if the old man next door were to know of it, of course he would break my neck."

"And what a story for Mrs. Grundy to get hold of!"

"She never will get the chance, please the Fates; you will see to that, Aunt Polly; and now, as it's nearly morning, I think I will go to roost."

"Come and kiss me, Roger," said the old lady, holding up her faded cheek; "and forgive me for all the nasty things I said just now. You *are* a good sort; I always liked you as a small child, for, although a surprisingly naughty boy, you were a thorough little gentleman. They say the child is the father of the man, eh? You have done that poor girl next door a good turn."

"And I wish you would do her another; you have so much in your power. Have her in, Aunt Polly, and make her life a little brighter and happier. No one knows how to do it, better than yourself."

"Roger!" she protested, with a flattered chuckle, "and no one knows how, to blarney better, than yourself. How dare you attempt to befool an old woman like me, sir? Be off to your bed, at once."

## CHAPTER X.

## A FORLORN HOPE.

TELEGRAM from Captain Hope, Holland Gardens, Morptingham.

To Major Cuthbert, Naval and Military Club.

"Buy me five pounds' worth of rare foreign stamps. Send immediately. Am writing."

To which an answer came by post :

"DEAR ROGER,

"Your wire received. Are you developing softening of the brain, or is there a lady in the case? Either way, the sooner you clear out of Morptingham the better; I shall expect you for Kempton Park on the 19th. There are lots of fellows in town asking for you; I have not told them, that you have taken the collecting craze in your old age. I send you five pounds' worth, and hope you will think them value for good money (I don't). I got a chap who knows all about them, to buy them for me; I said they were for a *lady*; so they are—are they not?

"I saw the other day, that some one—whose name I forget—had left in his will, to the British Museum, a collection of stamps valued at £70,000; so there must be money in the business. I met

Warden and his wife, in Piccadilly yesterday ; you remember him long ago at Mussurabad ? Mrs. Warden has a small face, and eyes like a pair of gig-lamps, and looks as if she had had a disappointment in early life ; I'm afraid *he* was the disappointment. The weather up here, is like my tailor's bill, unsettled ; all the same, I'd rather have wet days in town, than fine days in the country ; I can't imagine what you see in that hole, Morpington. I shall expect you to lunch with me here, next Sunday, at two o'clock sharp.

"Yours,

"R. CUTHBERT."

Armed with a good courage, a certain amount of stamps, and two tickets for a box at the theatre, Roger strolled over to No. 13, one day after luncheon. His aunt had pointed out to him, that there was a very considerable ingredient of danger in the expedition, but Captain Hope was a gentleman of adventurous temperament. As he waited on the steps, he distinctly heard the monotonous sound of a human voice ; he glanced towards the drawing room, and saw that the window was open at the top. Miss Yaldwin was evidently reading to her grandpapa, and the subject was not specially interesting. As he listened, he caught the words :

"The improvement in iron, and steel, is main-



tained. There is a decidedly better feeling in the cotton trade. The price of raw cotton, is very low, and the supply promises to be abundant. The wheat harvest is still quiet."

"It was only common humanity to interpose," said Roger to himself, as he felt the tickets in his breast pocket.

The door was now opened, and he was ushered into the study, where he was immediately joined by the general. He seemed pleased to see him, and evidently augured a whetted taste for stamps, from this early call. After expatiating for some time on a recent article in a service paper, he said :

"And now I must show you, a rare Nova Scotian I got this morning. I fancy, it will open your eyes."

"And I," said his wily visitor, "have got a few specimens for you from a friend. I don't know whether they are any good or not."

"You are extremely kind. What?" raising his voice excitedly, as he unfolded, and beheld the contents of the paper. "You don't mean to say that he has sent you two Swiss locals, and a Pony Express? Why, these, if genuine, are valuable stamps. He must be an advanced collector, and a rich and generous man to spare them."

Now sitting down and examining them critically through his glasses: "My own two cent Pony

Express is not nearly as perfect as this, and I could exchange, or sell, this Mauritius stamp, for fifteen shillings any day. Your friend is a trump, sir. What is his name?"

"The man who got them for me? His name is Cuthbert. I am glad they are good specimens," replied Roger, putting up his hand to conceal a smile.

If Bobbie Cuthbert, could only hear himself spoken of, as a trump, and an advanced collector of foreign stamps!

This unexpected offering, had warmed the general's heart; rich as he was, he thoroughly appreciated the valuable donation, which he could exchange or dispose of on good terms; and seeing this, Captain Hope boldly discharged his second barrel.

Drawing out two pink tickets, as if they were entirely an afterthought, he said: "My aunt has a box for the theatre to-night" (he himself had taken it), "and she wants to know, if you and Miss Yaldwin will come and share it? She sent me in to ask you, and to say, that she will be very much disappointed, if I don't bring her a favourable reply."

"My dear fellow!" cried the general, "I never enter a theatre, though years and years ago I actually used to act! An old fogie like me, has no business in such places."

"I really do not see why not."

"Oh, well, I don't care for the theatre now; and I'm afraid of the draughts; and after dinner, a rubber of whist next door is the fullest extent of *my* tether. Your aunt plays a wonderfully sound game; but, like all women, she is shy of opening up her trumps."

"And about Miss Yaldwin, sir?" persisted Roger. "May she go? My aunt will take her, and bring her safely home."

"Rose! Bless my soul! She has never been inside a theatre in her life!"

"Then don't you think, the sooner, she makes a start the better?"

"I am not sure of that. She is a strange girl, and must be driven on a tight curb. Quiet, demure, and domestic as she looks, she can break out." (Yes, and in a manner that *he* little dreamt of.) "She has a high spirit, and high spirits, must be kept on short commons. Of course, it's not to every one, I would say so much; but you are a sensible man, Hope—not like the vacant-faced, languid idiots one generally meets; yes, an unusually sensible young man; and understand, that I like to keep up a certain amount of domestic discipline; it's necessary, I assure you."

"Discipline is one thing, sir, but an entirely secluded life is quite another matter. Miss

Yaldwin has seen nothing of the world. She is almost a Purda Nashin."

"And so much the better for her," snarled her grandfather. "The world is a bad place."

"But surely an occasional outing is no harm; a concert, a theatre, or even a little dance? You yourself, lead far too retired a life, sir—you really ought to go out into society, and allow people to make your acquaintance; excuse me, if I am too urgent. Until yesterday, Major Chatterton told me he had no idea that *you* were the hero of Lasswari—Yaldwin of Lasswari."

The old man's face flushed suddenly; his eyes sparkled; and who knows, but that for a moment, his mental vision carried him back to the field of action; and he felt his springing Arab, bounding under him, heard the cheering and battle cries, and smelt the powder, and the smoke. But in an instant, his expression changed, and he said: "Ah, Hope, my good fellow, there is another side, to the shield—a side you have not seen!"

But Hope *had* seen it—that hour between midnight and dawn—when he kept pace with the rapid footsteps of Rose Yaldwin.

"Miss Yaldwin is young, sir," he pleaded, with a boldness and a persistency that he knew was perilously venturesome, "and, pardon me, for saying it, leads a melancholy life; you can see it, in her face."

The general could pardon much, to a young man who brought him such excellent stamps, but there *was* a limit. He was about to make some brusque reply, when the door opened, and the subject of their conversation, came in, carrying a brace of grouse in her hand. Now, her grandfather loved grouse above all birds of the air ; and surely this was a propitious moment, and the battle was to Captain Hope.

"Grouse from Inverness ; from old Tonnachy ! Good ! and shot," examining the card, "on the 25th. Just right for dinner to-night ; tell the cook." He glanced at the recent present of stamps, and then at the grouse—their combined forces softened his heart. He looked keenly at his granddaughter. Yes, she *was* pale, and had a downcast and depressed air ; though it was a piece of deuced cheek, on young Hope's part to say so—to tell him so to his face. She was a pretty girl, too ; but it seemed, that she could not even say good-morning to a man without becoming crimson. To tell the truth, it was the first time, Rose had met Roger Hope, since her escapade.

"Rose !" said the general, "here is Mrs. Baggot wanting to take you to the theatre to-night. What do you say ?"

"The theatre ! Oh, grandpapa !" she faltered, looking quite bewildered at the news.

"Would you like to go? I suppose I need scarcely ask you—but you *may* go."

"Thank you very much," she replied in a low voice, never once casting a glance, at Mrs. Baggot's emissary.

"But how are you to get in?" inquired the old gentleman; you won't be back till after twelve. I suppose Leach must sit up. A girl like you can't be using a latch-key," he added facetiously. "Eh, Hope?"

Miss Yaldwin's blushes, were positively distressing to behold, as she caught Captain Hope's eye, and muttering some inaudible excuse, about the grouse, she got herself out the room, rather suddenly.

In the afternoon, she received a friendly note from next door, to say that she was to come in to dinner, and start afterwards with them. The mode of sending messages between Nos. 13 and 15 was in this wise: some one rapped on the drawing-room window; it was opened, and the note, book or paper handed in at the end of a pair of lazy tongs. Rose's pleasant invitation, had come in this fashion; and she was allowed to write an acceptance. She was in such a state of exultation, she did not know what to do; she could not settle steadily down to "Beggar my neighbour," much less cribbage. As for her evening dress, she had but one, so her mind was not distracted by a difficulty, in making a

choice. She possessed a simple black net gown—rather rusty with age—this would not show at night—but what was she to do for an opera cloak? Luckily the same idea had occurred to her grandmother, who was almost as excited as herself, and greatly exercised in her mind, and who kept repeating, “Rose going to a theatre,” “Rose going to a theatre;” whilst the minar bawled, “Hold your tongue!” and “Chooprow” (same thing in Hindustani), sent every one up to their rooms, and summoned the cook, in a voice of thunder. Rose had no cloak, and no evening gloves; that was certain; but Mrs. Yaldwin believed, she had a crimson and gold wrap somewhere; yes, perhaps it was at the bottom of the tin-lined box, and Clark—the housemaid—must run down to the shops, and buy a pair of gloves. Rose had never felt so fond of her grandmother, as she was that evening. The gloves and cloak were procured, and then the old lady fussed, and fussed, herself, almost into a fever, until she drove the girl up to dress, at about five o'clock. Her toilette was not a prolonged affair, like Mrs. Baggot's. She had the art of arranging her own hair well—rather an uncommon accomplishment; she twisted it up in fashionable Empire style, put on her black gown, fastened a string of tiny seed pearls round her throat, and was ready long—long before it was time for Leach to conduct her next

door. He was necessarily her escort, as the general would not hear of what she called "running in alone." She was early; but she found the ever punctual Annie, sitting in the drawing-room, filling up the spare moments, with her crotchet—an employment at which she seemed indefatigable. How many thousand yards of white wool did she work into socks, and babies' shoes, and jackets, and comforters, during the twelve months?—it would be a serious mathematical problem. Presently the two ladies were joined by Mrs. Baggot, in a smart crimson brocade, with a Marie Stuart collar, and feathers in her hair, and Roger, in the usual claw-hammer suit, affected by gentlemen. Both he—notably *he*—and his aunt were immensely struck by Rose's appearance. Here, indeed, was a great transformation. Her bare arms, and throat, the different arrangement of her abundant hair, and the brilliance of her eyes, and complexion, combined to make Miss Yaldwin, an exceedingly beautiful girl Roger, had never seen her previously of an evening. Was it the candle-light, or the rays of a little pleasure, that so entirely altered this grave-eyed neighbour, into a smiling, sparkling, young lady?



## CHAPTER XI.

## A DESPERATE REMEDY.

"WHAT a strange effect this lamp shade has!" remarked Roger. "Our faces are all *couleur de rose*."

"*Couleur de rose* indeed," acquiesced Mrs. Baggot, who sat opposite her daughter; "and that reminds me, of a little anecdote I must tell you, though it is rather against myself." She paused, having caught Annie's eyes severely fixed upon her, then exclaimed impatiently, "My dear, good, moral Annie! You need not look so terribly scared. It takes all the pith out of my speech, when I meet your solemn gaze. That seems to say, 'Now *do* take care; pray don't let us have any improper stories'—as if I ever erred, in that way. Even my worst enemies, must allow, that I have always been the most uncompromising opponent, of anything *at all décolleté*."

"Mother! As if I even dreamt of such a thing. What an extraordinary imagination, you have!" protested her offspring.

"It is not more extraordinary, than your expression, my love, which must cruelly slander your real feelings. Rose, I hope *you* never endeavour,

to train up your grandparents, in the way they should go."

Rose burst into a merry, girlish laugh, and Mrs. Baggot, who was evidently stung by certain poignant memories, went on, in a half-bantering manner:

"Look at me; I am in leading strings. People stared, to see me on horseback. They will stare a good deal more, when they meet me some day, being wheeled out in a perambulator by Annie, and probably playing with an india-rubber doll."

"Mother!" gasped Miss Baggot, now seriously annoyed.

"I tell you," addressing Rose and Roger, "that when Annie and I pay a visit together, I positively dread leaving. I know, I shall be hauled over the coals for something, the instant I am outside the house, and therefore, I linger unduly from sheer terror. It will be: 'Mother, how *could* you stay so long?—you sat twenty minutes—they were *dying* for us to go;' or, 'Why did you talk to one person, and not to another?' or, 'Why did you whisper?—why did you laugh?' And on the other hand, when we receive friends, the case is even worse. Why, did I ask people to have tea? or why did I *not* ask them?—why did I inquire for So-and-so, when I must have known she was in a lunatic asylum?—and how could I talk to Mrs. Smith

about sons, when her son had just got a month with hard labour?—what did I mean, by telling Mrs. Query the rent of the house?—and so on. Is it not true, Annie?”

“My dear mother, you must always have your joke,” replied Miss Baggot, with the bland air of contemptuous indulgence, one extends to a naughty child.

“Now, Aunt Polly,” said Roger, “when are we to hear your story? You have wandered far, from it.”

“Yes, so I have. Well, once upon a time, when I was eighteen, I hope you will not be greatly shocked to hear, that I was subject to cold feet, and, alas! to a red nose. The latter, was specially brilliant at parties and dinners, and made me intensely unhappy. A sympathetic girl friend, imparted to me, as a great favour, an infallible cure for both; and I proceeded to carry this grand remedy into effect, the day we had an entertainment, in honour of a neighbour; who was a rich, young, and witty bachelor—not to speak of being the catch of the county. I knew, that if I did not take precautions, my nose would outrival, as usual, the ruddiest cherry; and as I dressed, I carried out my benefactress’s sovereign prescription. I rubbed a quantity of dry mustard, into the soles of my feet;—rubbed hard for about five minutes, previous to

drawing on my silk stockings, and satin shoes. No immediate effects followed. It was a bitterly cold night ; my feet were lumps of ice. However, after being in the drawing-room for a short time, they thawed, and became thoroughly comfortable. We went in to dinner, and during soup I experienced a delightful glow. ' Ah, this is something like ! ' I mentally ejaculated, as I gaily conversed with the guest of the evening, who was seated on my right hand. During the fish, my tootsicums began to make me think of fried soles. By the time I had refused the first *entrée*, they were on fire. Ere the joint was on the table, I felt as if my unfortunate feet were being slowly roasted before a furnace : I could have shrieked aloud. I meditated on the Spartan boy, and endeavoured to emulate him, entirely in vain. I would make but a pitiful martyr ; I caught a glimpse of myself in a spoon ; alas ! not nose alone, but my whole face was crimson ; my answers were imbecile, my laughter hysterical. The wit, on whose words the whole table was hanging was addressing himself specially to me, and telling me an excruciatingly funny story, to which I was listening, with tears of agony rolling down my face, and an expression to correspond. At last I could bear the torture no longer ; I pushed back my chair and sprang up, without any excuse, and rushed headlong from the room. Kind people, said I was

faint ; unkind people, that I felt a preliminary warning of a *fit* ; others, that it was the champagne ! To this day, one or two old inhabitants in our own county, invariably speak of me, as the mad Miss Hope."

"And how did you testify your gratitude, to your dear, kind, sympathetic, friend ?" inquired Roger.

"I have never seen her since, a most fortunate circumstance, as far as she is concerned. That was a frightful experience. But I always enjoy dinner parties : not for the eating—no one can call me a greedy old woman—but the company. Indeed, if I have a pleasant partner next me, I often forget to eat at *all*."

"You don't find that reason, for fasting, in these days, do you ?"

"Well, on the whole, I am rather lucky, I must confess," rejoined Mrs. Baggot complacently.

"And I, am frequently unfortunate," said Roger. "The other evening, at a dinner in town, a pretty little married woman fell to my share. I tried the weather, the park, the pictures, even the new-shaped bonnets, and only extracted yes or no. She never originated one single remark, until the dessert was on the table. Then she turned, and suddenly looking up at me, with a most pathetic pair of eyes, lisped out this precious piece of news :

"‘Do you know—baby cut a tooth to-day!’"

"I can beat that Roger," said his aunt with animation. "Once I went down to dinner, with a long-headed, clean-shaven, grim-looking man, that my hostess whispered was a rising star. Like you, I tried topic after topic, and only elicited yes or no, or a mere nod of the head. This continued for fully an hour, and I had no outlet for talk on my other hand, for the man was engaged, and sitting next to his *fiancée*. At last, I lost my temper a little, and said to my friend rather tartly:

"‘I have tried to converse with you, on almost every subject under heaven. Would you kindly gratify my curiosity, and tell me, if there is anything that *does* interest you?’"

"He nodded solemnly in the affirmative.

"‘And what may it be?’ I asked breathlessly.

"He turned, as if he was about to put a pistol to my head, and answered, in a most sepulchral voice:

"‘*Criminal law.*'"

"After that I gave him up."

"I don't wonder," said Roger sympathetically.

"It is a pity, that your man, and my lady, could not have been paired off, and that you, and I, could have taken one another in."

"Yes, but I don't think that *two* agreeable

people are often put together," remarked Mrs. Baggot complacently.

"Thank you very much, for the implied compliment. Aunt Polly, allow me to drink your health."

Rose Yaldwin soon discovered her tongue, amidst the cheery company, and Captain Hope was surprised to find, how thoroughly well she was posted up in all the topics of the day. As regarded army affairs, he assured her, with a laugh, that he was literally nowhere, and in comparison to her—not in it.

"I do not read for my own information or for choice," she explained; "I read aloud to grandpapa, you see."

"And what does he select?"

"First of all the share list—the money market. I can give you hints there," with a bewitching smile. "Then we have the army news, and the whole *Gazette*, by the light of which, we correct our monthly army list; next we take the speeches in parliament; lastly, the news of the day."

"You skip, of course?"

"No, grandpapa marks all he wishes to hear; some people's speeches he never cares for."

"And what else do you read?"

"A good many of the magazines, the articles—

not the stories—those I read to myself: grandpapa objects to novels.”

“What! even to military novels?”

“He would think them the worst kind of all.”

“Profanation, I suppose! And what about the stamp magazine.”

“That he reads to himself, thank goodness; for I hate stamps.”

“Oh, come, I say; this is rank treason! Do you know that a member of parliament has a collection worth thousands of pounds? You read *his* speeches—to the last word.”

“Not that I know of.”

“I am becoming enthusiastic about stamps; I have taken the infection from your grandfather. May I ask, if you have no little human weakness yourself for crests, coins, or autographs?”

“I have a collection of wild flowers, pressed in a book; I am very fond of flowers. And pray what have you?”

“Oh, my dear child,” broke in Mrs. Baggot with a laugh, and a shrug, “apply to *me* for information on that subject; he has a collection of the photographs, of all the pretty girls, of his acquaintance.”

“I have nothing of the sort,” he answered hastily. “Aunt Polly, that is a bit of pure romance.”

“Talking of romance,” said Annie, who had hitherto been steadily addressing herself to her



plate, "I have been reading rather a pretty book, and I will pass it on to you, Rose."

"I hope you will enjoy it, Rose," said Mrs. Baggot sarcastically. "I know the style exactly that is so dear to Annie—it is the novel in which, the author continually pauses to reflect ; to analyze minutely the state of his head, when he has a cold coming on ; the state of his heart, when he returns from a dance ; and the state of his mind—if he has any. These introspections, continue through page after page of close print, and Annie swallows them greedily ; the only incidents, introduced to vary the monotony, are when some one gets a letter, or at the most, the measles."

"The sort of book to hand to your enemy, on a wet day," said Roger emphatically. "I can't stand that style. Give me lots of adventure, and love-making, and fighting. I like a hero, that flashes through a book, with any amount of crackers, and squibs, attached to his coat tails."

"I know quantities of adventures, scandals and incidents," said Mrs. Baggot expressively. "All the queer things I've seen, and heard, would fill a shelf—I often think *I* will write a novel."

"I sincerely hope, that you never will, mother," exclaimed Annie, with unaffected alarm.

"Why not, my dear?—and dedicate it to *you* ? How nice that would be—wouldn't it ?"

Miss Baggot's tell-tale expression, conveyed the idea, that that prospect was the reverse of pleasing.

"It should be crammed full of flirtations, and coincidences; and talking of coincidences, Roger, reminds me, that old Mrs. Merryweather, asked me to-day, if you were any relation to the officer named Hope, who distinguished himself so gallantly, with the mad dog?"

"And you—what did you say?" inquired her nephew, looking at her apprehensively.

"Why, of course I was only too proud to inform her, that you were the identical individual; and she was so immensely enthusiastic, that she nearly came straight off here, to have a look at you there and then! Why, *Roger*, I thought you told me that you had lost the faculty of blushing?"

"So I have; it's this contounded—I beg your pardon—ginger. By the way, Aunt Polly, is not that the fly?"

"I don't know, I'm sure; perhaps it is a polite hint that you want to smoke?"

"No, indeed," indignantly. "I never hint."

"Neither do I. Girls," addressing guest, and daughter, "you can go into the drawing-room now; I will stay, and keep Roger company."

## CHAPTER XII.

## TAKE CARE.

"Is she not passing fair?"

THUS dismissed, the two girls went into the drawing-room, and stood before the fire ; Rose stole several pleased, but surreptitious, glances, at herself in the glass over the mantelpiece, whilst Annie rubbed with her foot, a large complacent white Persian cat, that lay stretched at full length, upon the rug ; a handsome prize animal, with a tail resembling a boa, who rejoiced in the distinguished name of William the Conqueror, and was the property of Mrs. Skyler. She was passionately fond of cats, and some malicious people noted the fact, and said "like to like."

"What did Mrs. Baggot mean, about the mad dog?" inquired Rose presently.

"Oh, did you never hear? No, of course not ; though it was in all the Indian papers, and Roger got a lot of kudos. He does not like it talked of. I don't know, if you noticed, how he turned the subject ; he is different to some, who delight in seeing their names in print."

"But what is it all about?"

"Ask him, and perhaps he will tell you himself."

"I am sure he would not."

"Then I suppose, I shall have to relate it to you, and I am no good at this kind of thing ; you should hear it from my mother ; I can only give it in a few bald, common-place, sentences."

"Anything, anything," broke in Rose impatiently ; "only, do tell me before he comes in."

"It happened two years ago up in the Punjaub ; Roger was out shooting one afternoon, and coming home, passed near a small village, in a state of uproar. An immense black pariah, was raving mad ; it had bitten several dogs, two women, a man and a pony, and had taken up its position, in a niche by the village well, which no one dared approach ; no one dared stone it, for it dashed out at them ; there was not a gun within miles ; even Roger, had sent his on, with his shikari. When the people saw a sahib riding, they sent an embassy, for a sahib is always to be relied upon in danger. Roger, it seems, got off his horse, braved the brute in his lair—it was the act of a lunatic—and after an awful struggle, killed him with his hunting knife. Another man who came up, when it was all over, said it was the pluckiest and, at the same time, maddest thing he ever saw. Roger's coat saved him—strong shikar cloth, but it was torn from his shoulders

when the brute sprang, and he got one bite in the wrist——”

“Oh.”

“Yes; he cauterized it on the spot with a live coal from a Bunnia’s house; you can see the burn sometimes, when he stretches out his arm—it never came against him—though all his friends wanted him to go home to Pasteur, and every one said——”

Just at this interesting moment, the door opened to admit Mrs. Baggot and the hero of the exploit, and Rose never heard, what, “every one said.”

“Here is the fly in earnest, Annie and Rose,” said the old lady. “Put on your wraps at once, and let us be off.”

This evening, was indeed an epoch in Rose Yaldwin’s monotonous existence. Why, the sight of the theatre and drop scene, the rows of well-dressed people, the delightful string band, and the beautiful box, with its velvet-covered chairs, was amply sufficient to please her, had the curtain never risen. But the curtain did rise, and revealed Henry Irving and Ellen Terry in “Hamlet.” Rose gazed, and listened, and became actually transfixed; the other more seasoned playgoers—her companions—looked at her, and smiled significantly among themselves. Between the acts, she talked but little, her eyes were riveted on the drop scene, and her

thoughts absorbed by the Prince of Denmark. Mrs. Baggot's party occupied a stage box, and to see Miss Yaldwin seated in the front of it, looking brilliantly lovely, was a surprise to the half of Morpington. They had always considered her a pretty, dowdy stay-at-home, who was never allowed out of her grandfather's sight. Once upon a time, she had been invited to tennis parties, and little dances, but these invitations had been stiffly declined, and were never repeated. There were only too many girls in Morpington as it was, no need to endeavour to drag a reluctant recruit, into society. So Rose was abandoned to her fate, and the general was left in peace. He and his wife, went to one or two solemn dinners annually, and gave several lugubrious banquets in return, at which Miss Yaldwin was not present. She appeared in the drawing-room simultaneously with the coffee, and made herself useful, in handing about cups, shutting windows, turning over music. She was ornamental too. And people went away saying, "What a capital dinner it was, and how shamefully that girl was treated and dressed," and never gave her another thought. But there she was to-night, looking as bright, and happy, and well got up, as any one. How, had she contrived this sudden transformation? She was in Mrs. Baggot's charge—that went for something; every one knew, that she was a remark-

able woman, and did things, that socially speaking, would daunt, the stoutest heart. Apparently, she had bearded the old lion and carried off his lamb. Query : had that good-looking young officer—her nephew—given her any assistance in the raid ?

When the curtain finally fell, Rose sat like a girl in a dream, staring abstractedly at the drop scene, until Mrs. Baggot gave her a little poke and said :

"Well, my dear, you know you can't sit here all night ; come along."

"Oh, how I wish, we had only just come, and that it was all going to begin over again," she observed to Captain Hope, as he helped her, into her grandmother's mantle.

"You don't mean now, this very instant ?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, this very instant."

"Don't you think a nice little supper, would be a sort of agreeable interlude ?"

"No, indeed. How can you think of eating here ?"

"Oh, but, my dear," observed her hostess with a friendly tap, "you are coming in to supper all the same ; you must wind up the evening properly."

Rose was much too excited to eat, though she sat at table, and drank water, and crumbled biscuits, whilst her companions, made an excellent meal off

cold raised pie, anchovies on toast, *pâté de foie gras*, and such comestibles.

It was almost one o'clock, when she rose to depart.

"I hope you have enjoyed yourself, dear?" said Mrs. Baggot stroking her cheek.

("Why did she not kiss her?" her nephew asked himself enviously.)

"Oh, Mrs. Baggot! How can you ask? and how can I thank you?" said the girl tremulously.

Mrs. Baggot shot a swift glance at Roger, and said:

"Well, my love, I hope you will often come in again; this is just the thin end of the wedge, only don't say so to your grandfather. Roger, you will see Miss Yaldwin home."

Roger, made the very utmost, of those few yards of intervening gravel, and walked at a snail's pace. When they were on the steps of No. 13 he said:

"This is rather a better business, than the last time, I brought you home."

Before she could reply, the door was thrown open, and there stood Leach, a picture of dignified long-suffering, so Captain Hope merely wrung her hand, and ran down the steps.

"How pretty she looked to-night!" remarked Mrs. Baggot, who was turning down the lamps, as her nephew entered.



"Yes, didn't she?" he assented enthusiastically.

"She is like her mother," continued his aunt; "she was very handsome. I knew her slightly, a tall, elegant woman, who gave herself immense airs, and held me in supreme contempt, because I was the wife of an officer, in a native infantry regiment. She was of good family, and had a fine fortune. Poor soul! she had a sad come down in the world, and never held up her head afterwards.

"Well, Aunt Polly, you have broken one link in the chain—I mean in Miss Yaldwin's chain—and now I hope you will go on, and follow up your success."

"It strikes me, that Aunt Polly had not much to say to it, Master Roger," she rejoined. "Pray, who was it, that hired the box, and boldly took in the invitations?" (Mrs. Baggot was in ignorance of his outlay in stamps.) "You talk of breaking chains," she added, looking at him, with a meaning smile, over her flat candlestick. "Take care, my dear nephew, that you are not forging your own."

\* \* \* \* \*

As for Rose Yaldwin, she went to bed, and fell asleep and dreamt of Hamlet, of Captain Hope, and a mad black dog.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## UNDER SENTENCE OF DEATH.

"Thank you, good Sir, I owe you one."

—G. COLMAN.

"ROGER," said his aunt abruptly, as they sat at breakfast one morning, "do you know, that I am certain, that you will make an excellent husband?"

"Why?" he inquired with twinkling eyes. "Because I am carving this ham, so beautifully?"

"No; for various reasons. Because you seem so contented here with just two women, neither of us young or attractive; you never keep late hours—at least, ahem! hardly ever; you never seem idle or bored, you get our cabs, and wraps, when we go out, always remind us of our umbrellas, don't throw the chair-backs about, or muddle up the newspapers,—the *one* thing that ruffles my placid temper; you are very good-natured in going messages—especially next door——"

"In fact, I am quite a tame cat," he exclaimed, "and, apropos of cats," nodding at the great white Persian, who was devouring a plateful of fish, "was it not William the Conqueror who died of a surfeit of lampreys? I think his namesake, will very likely go out in the same way."

"No ; it was Henry the First, Roger ; I am ashamed of your ignorance," said Annie with unwonted sprightliness.

"Yes, yes, I recollect ; the man who never smiled again."

"And talking of cats, reminds me of dogs," continued Annie.

Really," said her cousin with a laugh, "it never has that effect upon me."

"I had a note from Rose Yaldwin ; it came as I was getting the breakfast. She wants us to take her dog Jacky."

"Why, I thought she was so fond of him ?"

"Yes, but the general is not partial to him. I believe he has been getting into terrible mischief. She wants to give Jacky away at once, in fact, to-day ; she even asked me, if one of our servants would take him. Imagine servants keeping dogs ! —that would be a nice state of affairs."

"Then, I suppose you will accept him yourself ?"

"Oh, dear, no ; my mother does not like dogs. Do you, mother ?" appealing to Mrs. Baggot, who was buried in a newspaper.

"It is not so much your mother," rejoined that lady, "as William the Conqueror ; he does not care for them."

"No, he only cares for nice plump little canaries," said Roger, referring to a recent tragedy.

"He is a spoilt creature," continued Mrs. Baggot in an apologetic tone. "In winter, he has a fire in his bed-room; he sleeps in the large dressing-room; and when he has a cold, Wickes, my maid—your know her?"

"A thin, elderly woman, in black."

"Like a pew-opener, yes; has to nurse him and open tins of sardines for him, and put a hot jar in his basket; and he ate all the young pigeons at No. 9, and he gives no end of trouble—but then, you see, he is Clara's cat."

Roger did not see, how that affected the question! unless Clara was supreme, and ruled her mother; and an old couplet came into his head:

"Who rules the country?—the king.  
Who rules the king?—the duke.  
Who rules the duke?—the devil."

Was it possible, to make a parody in his own family, and say:

"Who rules the house?—my aunt.  
Who rules my aunt?—the widow  
Who rules the widow?—the cat."

So he made no further remark, but walking to the window, began to whistle a tune.

"By-and-bye, Roger," said Annie, "I want you to run in next door with a bundle of wool, for the old lady; it is too heavy for the lazy tongs,

and she wants it, at once. She, and I, do a good deal of work for the Zenana boxes."

"Do you mean making those dolls' clothes?" pointing scornfully to an infant's sock.

"Nonsense, Roger! Have you never seen a baby's boot?"

"No, I did not know that they wore them; what's the good of a boot, to a thing that can't walk?"

"You are just in one of your tiresome moods this morning," rejoined his cousin. "Do go out into the garden and smoke, and let me know when you are ready to take in my message to No. 13."

"This moment if you like."

"No, certainly not; Mrs. Yaldwin is never down before twelve, though I believe the general is up and about at seven, watching for the postman, and worrying the servants."

Twelve o'clock, found Captain Hope next door *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Yaldwin. He had not merely brought the wool, but he was obliged to hold it, whilst the old lady slowly wound it off his hands, chattering shrilly all the time. Like the mynar, she was liable to her bad days—and this happened to be one of them.

"I'll do all the talking," she generously remarked to her prisoner; "you need only nod, or shake your head, and you do shout so, through the ear-trumpet.

I'm glad to see you ; I like to have young men coming in and out. When is Clara expected home ? ”

Roger shook his head.

“ Oh ! well, once *she* comes, we will see no more of *you*.”

At this he nodded like a mandarin.

“ Oh, yes ! she always ‘puckarows’ the men, and they like her. The general thinks no end of her, because she makes up to him. I’m very deaf, but I can see, and see through the widow Skyler. She’ll be glad to get another husband, and I pity whoever he may be. Mind, *you* don’t marry her, my dear young man.”

The young man shook his head more emphatically than ever.

“ Ah ! ” she continued, leisurely winding the while, “ I know her ; I was at the same hill station in the year—let me see—well, anyway, long ago. She flirted, and went on in a fine way, her poor husband down on the plains, sending her up nearly all his pay, and she running him into debt, and disgrace. And where did she get those diamond earrings ? tell me that.”

Roger again shook his head, in hopeless ignorance. He wished he could escape, or even get hold of the ear-trumpet, and hint to the old lady, that the gentle widow was his cousin ;

but he was literally hand-cuffed, and powerless to stir.

"Clara is a bad, bold, scheming, woman," resumed Mrs. Yaldwin viciously. "Though with her airs, and her graces, and her grand, unpaid-for dresses, she will soon get over you, and you will think me a nasty, spiteful, old witch ; but remember, I warn you *not* to marry her. Whoever is her second husband, will be a wretched man."

At this moment, the general joined them, looking unusually grim.

"Hullo, Hope ! I heard you were here. You and my wife, seem quite friendly and confidential, eh ? Look here, Sara," he shrieked ; "you must release your prisoner now, for I want him."

And Captain Hope, was not sorry to find himself shortly afterwards, at large and in his study.

"You are not the only prisoner," remarked the general gruffly. "I suppose you have heard of that d——d dog ? "

"What about him ? " inquired Roger.

"Why, you know, I never allow him in here ; he is Rose's mongrel, and somehow he got into this room early this morning, and found a whole sheet of stamps on the floor, and tore them up, and ate them—and *ate* them, sir ! " he repeated, his choler rising at the recollection. "Half a dozen Russians,

a Swede, three or four American locals, and about seven Italians. What do you think of that, eh?"

"I think," struggling hard to keep his countenance, "that it was an enormous breakfast, for one dog."

"Oh, *you* laugh! But I'll breakfast him! I can't afford to keep such an expensive animal; a brute, that swallows fifty shillings' worth of stamps, at a meal. He is chained in the cellar now, and as soon as ever Thompson, the gardener, comes from his dinner, he shall string him up—he shall be hanged."

"Hanged!" repeated Roger. "Could you not give him away to some one? he is a nice, smart, little dog."

"No! he shall hang by the neck, until he is as dead as a door-nail," rejoined the general ferociously. "Now don't try to beg him off!" knitting his brow fiercely as he spoke. "My mind is thoroughly made up, and I never change it."

Roger saw, that it was useless to argue at the present moment, and started a less unpleasant topic, and was soon embarked on an animated discussion, respecting an Indian campaign; while the general was rummaging for a map, wherewith to confound his adversary, his visitor looked round the now familiar room, and smiled to think, what rapid strides, he had made in his acquaintance



with the Yaldwins in so short a time. Was it little more than a fortnight, since he had taken forcible possession of the general's hat in church, and felt a passion of indignation, respecting the shabby seams of Miss Yaldwin's jacket; yea, and her mended gloves? how, as a friend of the family, he walked home with them from church, actually carrying the air-cushion, and was constantly invited into the general's own sanctum, and suffered to gloat over his last new stamp! To the great collection, he had already contributed nearly twelve pounds worth of specimens, and entirely qualified himself for admission into Earlswood, in the opinion of his friend, Major Cuthbert. A heated argument, in which he came off victorious, put the general into a most genial frame of mind. He had forgotten stamps, dog, execution, and everything, when old Leach knocked at the door, and said in a deep, gruff voice:

"If you please, sir, Thompson is here now."

"Oh!" ejaculated his master; and there was a pause, and he looked doubtfully at Roger.

"I say, general, give the poor beggar a reprieve; let him off this time. I'll be awfully obliged to you, if you will give him to me," pleaded his visitor.

"I certainly ought, to make you some return, for all those stamps Hope, and it's not much of a

gift, to burden you with a dog, I was going to hang, eh ? ”

“ I shall be delighted to have him ; he is rather a valuable little beast.”

“ Well, I suppose you may take him ! Leach, you may release the prisoner from cells ; there will be no execution.”

Thereupon Leach saluted with becoming gravity.

“ Get the brute’s collar, and chain, and bring him up,” continued the general. “ Now look sharp. Rose,” turning to his visitor, “ will be glad that her cur has got a home, and it’s more than he deserves. She has been in a fine way, all the morning, crying her eyes out, I believe.”

“ Well, sir, you can’t wonder, when her dog lay under sentence of death.”

“ And you have begged him off, and adopted him in order to spare her feelings ? ” surveying Roger as if he were a prisoner, in the orderly room.

“ Yes,” rejoined the other boldly, “ and also because I rather wanted a dog.”

“ Humph ! If all tales be true, I should have thought you’d be the last man to say *that*,” remarked the general.

Here a dismal clanking of chains, was heard in the hall, and Roger opened the door, and went out to survey his new possession. There sure enough,

was Jacky, looking piteously humble, and scarcely even venturing to wag his tail, and there was Miss Yaldwin, hurriedly descending the stairs ; she was pale, and her eye-lids were unquestionably pink, as she tremulously accosted him.

"Good morning!" he said in a cheery voice, taking the chain from old Leach ; "I am Jacky's master now. There has been a reprieve, you see."

"Oh, Captain Hope!" and her face coloured vividly, and broke into a smile, a smile of intense surprise, relief, and gratitude ; the sweetest smile, that Roger had ever had bestowed upon him. "Thank you so very much. Jacky and I are most grateful to you ; I hope he will be a good dog," and she stooped, and patted his rough grey head.

"At any rate, he will be out of the way of temptation ; he won't get a chance, of breakfasting on stamps with me."

"How did you beg him off?" she asked in a lower voice.

Her grandfather, who had momentarily disappeared into his study, caught the half-whispered question, and answered in his most military manner :

"He was spared, on the distinct understanding, that he was taken off the premises on the spot. Eh, Hope?" For this dalliance over the animal, did not please him.

As General Yaldwin stood at his study window, twisting his moustache, and watching the culprit being led away, he muttered to himself aloud :

"Now I wonder, if that young fellow, has any idea of Rose ? "

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### A HINT TO MRS. SKYLER.

"Syllables govern the world."

—J. SELDEN. .

AS the general gravely surveyed the parting guest from his own special lair (the study) Miss Baggot, who was also looking out, descried Roger, leading his recent—and evidently reluctant—present, up to the house.

"Mother ! What do you think ? " she cried. "I do believe Roger is bringing Jacky in here. Now don't take him," she continued authoritatively ; "on *no* account, allow yourself to be talked over."

But Roger, who entered as she concluded her commands, lost no time, in explaining, that he had merely rescued the condemned animal from the rope, that he was his own private property, and that after lunch he would remove him, and board him at the "Harp" ; but to this arrangement, his hospitable aunt objected. As a visitor, Jacky was welcome to remain, and although William the

Conqueror, made demonstrations of a warlike, and truculent character, the little grey terrier soon found himself completely at home. He and his master, joined the general and Miss Yaldwin, in their daily walks, and Annie also formed one of the party. She, and the elder man, paired off together, leaving Rose, Roger and Jacky—a happy trio—to bring up the rear. If Roger were to propose to Rose, he would please his cousin vastly ; in her queer, cold, phlegmatic, way, she was fond of the girl ; she liked Roger too, and she would feel thoroughly contented, and not a little triumphant, if the engagement were to take place before Clara descended upon the scene ! Clara would be furious, she was convinced, and if she returned before matters came to a crisis, alas, alas, for poor Rose's chance of ever becoming, her cousin by marriage. Clara, would enjoy enacting the unpopular post of third person in their walks, and talks—and undoubtedly end in ousting Rose. It would not be the first time, that she had meanly insinuated herself into another woman's place—was Roger not aware of all the precious time he was letting slip?—and that if hell is paved with good intentions, it is undoubtedly roofed, with lost opportunities. One day, there was a small expedition in a wagonette to Shelforde Park, the local great place. The general, and Mrs. Baggot, countenanced the excursion ;

Annie, Rose, Roger, and a hard-worked curate made up the party. There were leisurely meanderings through luxuriant gardens, grounds, and autumnal woods, tea at a keeper's cottage, and finally a walk to the lake, to feed the swans. As Roger and Rose, dispensed crumbs in company, the young lady said somewhat abruptly :

"You have been in Burmah, have you not?"

"Yes, up in the Chin Hills, if you can call that Burmah."

"And is your regiment there now?"

"My regiment has never been there; it is in Bengal, but it is under orders, for Upper Burmah, these next reliefs."

"Upper Burmah," she repeated. "That is where Hubert is. You are sure to meet him," she continued, with the simple faith, of one who has never realized the extent of the great British Empire, and to whom the province of Burmah, as represented on a map by two inches of pink paper, is a very small affair—instead of a country, that covers 120,000 square miles. "And when you come across him, oh! *will* you be kind to him?" she pleaded earnestly.

"Is he like you?" was the inconsequential reply.

"No—o, his hair is the same colour, but he is a Yaldwin, so grandpapa always declared, and I am

a Standish, a term of disgrace. I have told Hubert about you, and your kindness to me ; and I seem rather grasping, to ask you to extend it to him ; but you can advise him ; I am sure he would listen to *you*. But he is very impetuous, and high-spirited, and I am only a girl. I have no experience, and he does not mind me ; and I am afraid, he has got into a bad set."

As she looked at her companion, two big tears stood in her eyes, and the corners of her mouth, trembled, perceptibly.

"Ah! I am sorry to hear that."

"He does not go by his own name even," she continued timidly. "Last year it was Boyd, now it is Allen."

"Then how am I to know him, if I come across him?"

"Oh, he will know *you*; and at any rate you can always recognize him, by a queer three-cornered scar on his forehead, just below his hair on the left side."

"And how was he getting on, when you heard last?"

"Only middling, I am afraid ; and he said he loathed Burmah, and if he could get away and make a fresh start in Calcutta he would be all right. He wanted a little money—fifteen pounds."

She paused.

"Which you sent," continued her listener, as if simply stating a fact.

"Yes," she admitted reluctantly; "I gathered and scraped, it together, but he lent it all to a friend—he was always *so* generous—and it was never repaid."

"And what does he want now?"

"Well—he wants thirty pounds; you see I am telling you all our secrets—but I really cannot send it—at least not for a long time."

"Young rascal!" said Hope to himself, viciously aiming a bit of crust at a swagging bill. "Is he not in a situation of a sort?" he muttered aloud.

"He has been in several, but unfortunately they did not suit. There was too much work in one, he had an odious employer in another; and then, his health is bad. He was guard on the line between Rangoon and Thyatmyo, but was obliged to resign. If you ever meet him, I know you will be good to him, and perhaps put him in the way of some better appointment; but *promise* me, Captain Hope," she added imploringly, "that you won't lend him money."

"I'll promise anything, that you wish; but don't you think that it would not be a bad idea if you were to go out, and look him up yourself? that is to say——" in answer, to her face of complete bewilderment.



"*Ahem!* Mrs. Baggot has requested me to tell you, that the wagonette is waiting," said a clear, well-trained voice close behind them. Yes, there was the curate, Mrs. Baggot's emissary; there under the beech trees, was the wagonette, in which half the party was already seated. The question, of Miss Yaldwin's visit to Burmah, must be postponed till some future occasion.

"Could she have understood him?" Roger asked himself anxiously, as they tramped across the crisp short grass, in silence.

Morpingham society, never blind to such matters, began to notice "the marked attention" that Captain Hope was paying to Miss Yaldwin, and asked one another, "Did he know? or was he merely flirting with the girl?" And one morning, Mrs. Skyler came upon this passage, in a voluminous letter, from a lady correspondent: "Your cousin, Captain Hope, has been here for nearly four weeks; he is a nice, gentlemanly, young man; people are saying, that he is *very* much struck with Rose Yaldwin. I wonder if old Gunpowder, will come down handsomely?" The day following the receipt of this epistle, found Mrs. Skyler, in the bosom of her family.

## CHAPTER XV.

## ANNIE MAKES HERSELF DISAGREEABLE.

"One too many."

SHORTLY before dinner one evening, a day or two after the picnic, Mrs. Skyler drove up in a fly loaded with luggage, and made her presence felt as soon as she set foot in the hall. There was a calling for maids, ringing of bells, and a carrying of trunks, and tea, and curling-tongs, and hot water.

Whilst Roger and his aunt, and cousin, awaited the sound of the dinner bell, in the drawing-room, Mrs. Baggot said :

"You may always know, when Clara is at home ! she is so restless, and has every one on the run. Now, I, contrive to get things done quietly ; however, she certainly keeps us all alive."

At this instant, the door swung open, and Clara sailed slowly into the room. Roger, but vaguely remembered her, and to all outward appearance, he now beheld a complete stranger.

A slender woman, with great blue eyes, and quantities of light brown hair, rather a pale face rather a short nose, and a wide mouth, garnished

with white teeth, that displayed a perpetual smile. She was gracefully dressed, in a sort of nondescript clinging tea-gown, composed of soft cream silk, and laces ; and brought with her, as she advanced, into the apartment, a delicate odour of violets.

Mrs. Skyler was one of the leading ladies in Morpington society, and had such fascination, and charm of manner, that people did many things for her—that subsequently surprised themselves ! She seemed always to attain everything she desired,—save a second husband, said those ill-natured folk who had not fallen under her spells. According to her own account, she was in pressing demand, at various great country houses, and she sang, acted, and recited, to her entire satisfaction. Moreover, she had the reputation, of being able to twist any one,—no matter how steeled or prejudiced against her—round her pretty fingers, she had such sweet, supplicating manners, and such irresistibly coaxing little ways. Women querulously declared, that “she got all your secrets out of you in a twinkling, and despite her frank, and gracious air, never revealed a glimpse of her own.” Some said, that she was false and selfish to the core of her heart, that she had wrung every rupee, from a devoted husband, and lavished the money entirely on herself in the hills, whilst he slaved for her behoof—and finally died on the plains. She was vastly improved in appear-

ance from the lanky girl, who had been led to the altar fifteen years previously ; indeed she was now considered a pretty woman, possessed of many attractions, and money of her own ; but on the other hand, her enemies (and they were not a few) maintained, that she was in debt, that her fascinations were those of a boa constrictor, who licked its victim previous to devouring it, and as for her looks ! her mouth was crooked, hence her everlasting smile, and that she had a decided cast in one eye, which on occasions when she was angry or telling some most daring lie, developed into a truly fearful squint.

This was the woman, who came gliding over to Roger with outstretched hands, and said in a sweet caressing voice :

" Oh, my dear cousin ! How pleased I am to see you." To herself she merely remarked, " What a handsome, soldierly-looking young man ! What an idiot I have been ! "

" You should have come home before, Clara," said her mother.

" My own, darling, mother ! you know how touchy the Howards are. As it is, they are affronted at my short visit ; but I was resolved to renew my acquaintance with Roger at *any* cost."

" Well, Roger declares that he is going the day after to-morrow. I have had the greatest difficulty

in getting him to give me an extra fortnight," said Mrs. Baggot.

"Oh!" turning a pair of limpid eyes on her cousin. "You have had *your* fortnight, mother; now I shall have *my* turn. Roger will stay here until we make one another's acquaintance, won't you, Roger?" and she gave him one of her most killing glances.

Annie beheld afar off her sister's blandishments, and noticed Roger's (alas! he was but human, after all) appreciative smile. This was the way Clara always went on. How she could do it, she could not understand. No; poor, plain, downright, Annie, —these charms and ways are born, not acquired: and Captain Hope was already agreeably impressed by his new cousin's winning ways, and feminine graces.

"Now, Roger," said his fascinating kinswoman, "give me your arm and take me in to dinner, as I am the greatest stranger; and tell me what you have been doing with yourself."

Mrs. Skyler chatted away, and seemed quite a brilliant conversationalist, telling many amusing anecdotes, and leading up to some special *bons mots* that her mother and sister had heard fifty times before. She retailed a few malicious stories about her acquaintances, not even sparing her late hosts, and was altogether most entertaining (to Roger).

She gleaned but little of his movements ; he had dined out at the Gascoignes', the Halls' and the Westertons', and been to several tennis parties and dances.

"And pray what do you think of all our young ladies?" she asked. "Which of our beauties do you admire? Come now, confess."

"I admire them all," was his cautious reply.

"Yes, there is safety in a multitude, is there not?"

"I'll tell you some one he admires immensely," broke in Mrs. Baggot, most injudiciously, "and that is Rose Yaldwin."

"Rose Yaldwin!" echoed Clara, with a sharp note in her voice; and a shadow of aversion contracted the pupils of her limpid blue eyes. "That poor, stupid, sickly-looking girl next door! Oh, no! my own dearest mother; I have a better opinion of his taste than *that*!" and she gave him another of her most enchanting smiles.

"I certainly do admire her," said Roger stoutly. "She is one of the prettiest girls I have ever seen."

"But she has no conversation or style; she dresses atrociously; she has a consumptive complexion; and skulks into the room like a kitchen-maid," pursued Mrs. Skyler, rather foolishly. "And pray, tell me, what do you think of grandpapa?" and she giggled affectedly.

"Oh, he and I are the best of friends—sworn allies."

"Yes," added Mrs. Baggot, "and he has actually infected Roger with the stamp mania. I believe he will soon be an expert, and know as much about forgeries and reprints as his instructor."

"And you are great friends with the general!" repeated Clara incredulously. "Why, I did not think he had a friend in the place, save myself. Annie cannot endure him—but he loves *me*."

"Yes," cried Annie, firing up suddenly, "you humour him, with little sops at other people's expense. You take him in mother's latest papers, and my guava jelly, and fresh eggs. He likes you, we can bear witness; but why you like him, I never could make out. Of what *use* can he ever be to you?"

"Oh," with an indulgent laugh, "some day I may find a use for the poor old thing. Old gentlemen always adore me: I am all things to all men—from eighteen to eighty."

"But not to all *women*," rejoined her sister significantly.

"No, indeed; they bore me too dreadfully. But, my dearest Annie, what has ruffled the habitual serenity of your temper this evening? Toothache—a tight shoe—or is it a bill?"

Annie was no match for Clara, and was aware of

the fact. She coloured all over her face in ugly patches, and held her peace. She had been breaking a lance for Rose, and that was all. It maddened her to see distinctly, with her mind's eye, her sly sister's designs—designs against which poor Rose was defenceless. She saw them as plainly as if she had looked into the little widow's mind. Clara had age, will, experience, and wit, at her command. She had no scruples. She would break Rose's heart, and marry Roger. With respect to this last item, Annie's mental view was perfectly correct; Mrs. Skyler had already made up her mind to marry her cousin.

Annie had observed her sister's eyes slyly going round the room, to note if any change had been made, any new articles purchased in her absence. Suddenly her glance fell on Jacky, seated on the hearth-rug with the air of a dog who was confidently expecting his dinner—and that a good one.

"There is a *dog* here!" she exclaimed quite tragically. "Some of the servants have let him in. Oh, do hunt him out!"

"It is my dog," said Roger; "my dog Jacky. He is only here on sufferance and his very best behaviour. My aunt has kindly given him house room."

As he was explaining the matter, Mrs. Skyler's



eye was fixed on the intruder with a decided squint, and there was an expression on her face, that boded no good to the interloper. She had recognized him at once as Rose Yaldwin's property, but made no further remark. It was wiser to affect entire ignorance; but when a girl gives a man a pet dog, it means a good deal. Mrs. Skyler was not prepared for finding that things had gone so far.

After dinner, the piano remained closed; for Clara had appropriated her cousin, and reclined opposite to him in a low, deep chair, with her slender, well-shod feet crossed on a footstool fanning herself slowly with an enormous feather fan. One of her special gifts was, that she always seemed to know by intuition, what topic best pleased her companion of the hour. Little filmy feelers soon told her all she wanted. Roger liked India, and sport. This was sufficient. In an instant, she had simulated a sentimental affection, for the land she had so cheerfully quitted eight years previously. In a short time, her cousin was made aware that she, too, loved India, and longed to go back again to see the dear old country. Oh, the happy days she had spent out there! especially at Simla! And all her good, kind, friends, of long ago! She interlarded her sentences with Hindustani to emphasize her enthusiasm, and discoursed eloquently of well-

known grass widows, of celebrated sportsmen, of polo players, and even of ponies.

"If I were once back again in that happy land, do you think I would ever come home? Nay," shaking her head playfully, "Kubbi nay, kubbi nay, kubbi nay," *i.e.*, Never, never, never.

("What terrible falsehoods she *is* telling!" thought Annie, who was tatting within earshot.)

"But you have a first-class time at home," observed Roger. "Your own mistress, and no ties."

"Yes, that's the misery of it," and she sighed profoundly. "No ties—no ties."

"Why, Clara," protested her sister impatiently, "you know very well you hate and loathe children, and have always said you were so thankful——"

"Yes, I'm glad I never had any 'Butchas,'" she said to Roger, "for one never knows, how they may turn out, and break one's heart. It was of my dear husband that I was thinking—but enough about myself. Tell me, are you really not joking, when you say you like that old Bahahdur next door—do you mean it?"

"I always mean what I say," he answered promptly.

"*How* nice! Generally, you know, 'Hope tells a flattering tale!'" and she smiled at him over the top of her fan.

Mrs. Baggot, who was affecting to read, and

sharing for once, Annie's usual position, viz., out in the cold, got tired of her book, and, bundling up her things, yawned extravagantly and departed, leaving Clara weaving spells for her cousin.

Clara wished Annie would follow her mother's most excellent example. It was dreadful to have her sitting there, like Mordecai the Jew! She could talk so much more freely and sympathetically to Roger, if they were alone. But Annie did not budge.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### MRS. SKYLER'S CASTLE IN THE AIR.

"Expectation is the fool's income."

THE younger and better-looking of two plain girls, is generally, in her own circle, at least, considered quite handsome; much on the same principle, that the youngest of a large family of daughters, is always so *very* juvenile.

From early days, Clara Baggot had been put before her sister; she was the smartest, and had the most taking ways, and was reputed to be clever; though, as a child, her cleverness did not seem to assume any more tangible form, than that of invariably securing the largest share of sweets, fruit, and toys, for her own behoof; this facility for getting the best of everything, developed into a talent, as

she grew up! the most comfortable bedroom, the best seat in the carriage, the prettiest dress were her invariable lot; as for her so-called "cleverness," it did not extend much beyond the art of cutting up her acquaintances in an amusing fashion, behind their backs, and flattering them successfully to their faces. Clara had all the advantages that usually accrue to an eldest daughter, and carefully relegated to her sister, any little drawbacks attending that position. To Annie, fell the stupid visitors to entertain, the old saddle and the shying horse, and all such small tasks, as answering notes and letters, paying duty calls, putting up parcels, arranging flowers and taking the dhoby's account; whilst, on the other hand, Clara allotted to herself the most eligible young man at their home dinner parties and entertainments, and appropriated almost entirely, their joint ayah, tailor, and pocket money.

At last one glad day, Clara became Mrs. Skyler, and there was an end of this *régime*, and Annie, who was devoted to her mother, now took her proper place at home, and became after a little, the mistress of the house; these were her happiest days, and they lasted for seven years; but, alas, there was an end of them, when Clara (with her pension as a civilian's widow) returned as a matter of course, to share her mother's roof. There had been some faint idea—and a strong desire on Annie's part—

that Mrs. Skyler would take a little house for herself; but no, "why should she?" she asked tearfully; "she wished to be with her own darling mother;" and Annie, after a feeble struggle, fell into the old ways. Clara's was the master mind; she kept an unrelaxing grasp on whatever object was for her individual advantage; it was unquestionably for her advantage, to share her mother's home, and she had quite as much right to it as Annie. Annie did all the drudgery as of yore, and chiefly for Clara's benefit. It was she, who dusted the drawing-room, arranged fresh flowers, sent in tea, and nice hot cakes, saw that the lamps were burning properly, whilst her widowed sister presided rather languidly over the tea equipage, and entertained the family guests. Annie went the errands and did the marketing, in all weathers; whilst Clara lolled at home in an arm-chair over the fire. Clara discoursed vivaciously to acquaintances, whilst she sat dumb, and stupid, and shabby. She lent her sister money, she mended her stockings, and went her messages, for she was weak and dared not rebel; in a war of words, she was invariably worsted. Clara had such an extent of vocabulary, such fluency, such a pitiless, razor-edged tongue, and easily reduced her sister to tears, submission and abject misery, by telling her, how old, and ugly, and stupid she was, and what people said

of her behind her back, and how *no* one liked her ! All this Annie bore uncomplainingly, but she had naturally no love for her fascinating relation ; it may seem unnatural, but actually she did not like her ; she tried to do so over and over again, and finally gave it up. Now and then—but very rarely—she found some trivial opportunity of making herself disagreeable to her tyrant. To-night, was one of these supreme occasions, and she availed herself of it to the fullest extent. She even had the hardihood to draw up her chair, and thrust herself into the *tête-à-tête*, between her sister, and her cousin !

An hour after Mrs. Baggot had retired to bed, Clara suddenly appeared beside it, and sitting down on the edge, with an insinuating air, said :

“So you have a musical party to-morrow afternoon, darling, and I am just in time. Now tell me what you are going to sing, and what you are going to wear, and who is coming.”

The simple old lady was deeply gratified, and gave the fullest answers to both questions ; and then her clever daughter proceeded to gradually extract from her, all the local news, the state of her monetary affairs, and many particulars concerning Roger. She managed it all so sympathetically and affectionately, that Mrs. Baggot never dreamt that

she was being most artfully pumped ; she was a little afraid of Clara—if she was afraid of any one—she had queer, dumb, white, rages that were excessively unpleasant, and she was charmed to find that Clara had returned home in such an unusually gracious frame of mind.

"And so Roger has become most popular here," said his artful cousin ; "that I can easily believe. How did he manage, to get that dog from next door?"

"Oh, he was going to be hanged, and he begged him off."

"Was *that* the way?" much, though secretly relieved. "And of course, dear, you were joking when you said that Roger admired the Yaldwin girl. Why, he can scarcely know her."

"Oh, he knows her exceedingly well, he is there almost every day ; as for admiring, one never can tell, who a man really admires till he is married, and not always *then*," said the old lady sententiously. "You recollect how young Prescott was said to be devoted to the second Miss Stratton two years ago, and you know he went and married a fishmonger's daughter."

"Roger is not that sort of man," retorted Mrs. Skyler severely.

"No ; but at any rate he knows the Yaldwins very well."

"How, did he contrive to scrape acquaintance, dearest?"

"Oh, the general called, of course; and he goes there and takes him stamps; the old man seems quite fond of Roger."

"Takes him stamps! What magnificent disinterestedness! And pray where does he get them?" inquired Mrs. Skyler.

"Oh, buys them, I fancy — I have never inquired."

"I see," nodding her head sagaciously, and rising from the bed. "Well, dear, I have enjoyed this nice long chat so much, but I must not keep you awake any longer. *Dormez bien!*" and stooping over, she kissed her sweetly and departed.

Once in her own apartment, Mrs. Skyler seated herself before her dressing-table, and surveyed herself mechanically, as she removed her rings, and bangles.

"When Roger has taken to actually purchasing stamps, for that old tiger next door, things must have gone pretty far. Oh, dear me, to think what a blind old bat my mother is! and that girl of all others! Now, if it had been one of the Strattons or the Gascoignes, I would not have been surprised. However, as it is, I *think* I can easily manage to nip the affair in the bud." And she smiled at herself in the mirror "I wear well; I am only a few



years older than Roger. I wonder if he knows ! If I had supposed for a moment, that he was so thoroughly eligible and personable, I would have come home at once. As it is, she has got a start, and I must only do my little best to make up for lost time." (She had made up her mind that he must stay a fortnight, and that a proposal would be the natural and proper conclusion of his visit.) "I never heard until to-night, that Roger had six hundred a year besides his pay, and he is well up in the captains too ; I shall make him exchange into a cavalry regiment when he gets his majority."

Hence it will be seen, that, clever as she was, acute, far-seeing and cautious, Mrs. Skyler was given, like less talented mortals, to the fatal mistake of "counting her chickens before they were hatched."

## CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. SKYLER PUTS A "SPOKE IN SOME ONE'S  
WHEEL."

"But all was false, and hollow ; though his tongue  
Dropped manna and could make the worse appear  
The better reason."

—MILTON.

ELABORATE preparations had been made (by Annie) for Mrs. Baggot's musical party, which was to last from five to seven. The dining-room was given up to refreshments : tea, coffee, sweets and ices ; the table was tastefully decorated, and two hired waiters were in attendance ; Mrs. Baggot was far too independent to borrow the services of Leach. The drawing-room had been arranged to accommodate a number of people ; the boudoir was opened for the occasion, and all the rooms had been most beautifully adorned with flowers. Soon after five, flies and bath-chairs began to arrive, and the bell scarcely ceased ringing : Mrs. Baggot, in her best afternoon gown, received about sixty guests, and the rooms were pretty well crammed ; the dining-room especially presented the appearance of a struggling sea of sealskins, handsome beaded mantles, imposing bonnets, tweed and broad-cloth shoulders, and grey and bald heads. Clara, as

joint hostess, was invaluable on these occasions ; exquisitely dressed in some filmy grey and silver garment, her hair picturesquely arranged, her fingers glittering with rings, she flitted about saying something "sweet" to every one, sorting acquaintances, so to speak, into "lots," finding them seats, sending men into the refreshment room in charge of important dowagers, selecting who was to sing, and what they were to sing, and when. She chose Roger as her own special *aide de camp*, and kept him constantly employed ; not once, had he been able to seize a moment in order to exchange a word with Rose Yaldwin, whom at an early period Clara herself had graciously piloted into a distant corner (rather behind a sofa), and there effectually blocked her egress, by planting beside her a substantially-built matron—who was certain to remain at her post until the entertainment was over (it was in these little details, that Clara was so clever).

Mrs. Yaldwin, whose presence at such festivities was unusual, occupied a reserved seat near the piano, with her ear-trumpet in her hand. The music proved to be first-rate ; Morpington was a notoriously "musical" settlement ; one lady played Schumann's music magnificently, several proficients of both sexes sang : there were vocal solos of various descriptions, a tenor gave a love song in a

fine fruity voice, a bass followed, with a melody, which gurgled up from unfathomable depths, and between the performances, was a loud humming Luzz of conversation. Most of the company were old Indians, and here and there, you caught scraps of news from the East. Bald-headed, moustached men and portly ladies exchanged morsels of "gup" and you gathered that Annie Boyson had gone to Mussouri this year, as her husband was employed in the Doon; that George Franks was now collector at Kutcha, and Tom had exchanged into a Sikh regiment; that the cholera was bad at Benares, thirty-three cases in a week; and that the rupee would touch one-and-threepence before it stopped.

Mrs. Baggot sang a pretty little ballad, that merely required taste and expression, and sang it with considerable success; but during a momentary silence, a little wizened lady with a yellow face and beady black eyes, was heard by her immediate surroundings to remark to her neighbour in a shrill falsetto, "Dear me! I heard her sing that very song at Muttra, just five-and-thirty years ago; but her voice is gone, it's like a pair of broken bellows!" Poor Mrs. Baggot, this was indeed hard on her; and she had, moreover, a horrible consciousness that her ancient neighbour by the piano, had imparted to various interested listeners,

the fact, that she was only four years younger than herself. Yes, she was almost certain that she heard that harsh, cracked treble, saying, "*Only* four years younger than I am ; would you believe it ?" The sentence seemed to haunt her, to ring in her ears.

Roger circulated in the throng, carrying cups, bringing music, and making himself useful. Rose from her retreat noted with surprise how intimate he and Clara had already become, how she bore him about with her, and tapped him familiarly on the arm, and smiled up into his eyes, and whispered to him confidentially, and sent him messages ; and Clara had only renewed her acquaintance with him yesterday ! Of course he was her cousin, but—but, poor Rose, she saw but too plainly how it would be : Captain Hope must surely lose his heart to Clara Skyler, she was so gay, and pretty, and beautifully dressed, so self-possessed, and conscious of her charms, so *very* different to herself—a silent, stupid, dowdy girl, sitting neglected, and forlorn, in a corner. In fact she went so far as to assure herself passionately, that she was only fitted for such a position, and Mrs. Skyler had displayed the truest kindness in placing her there. How could she—who had naturally stiff and shy manners—move about the room in her shabby hat and dyed dress, and converse in a sprightly fashion with strangers ? Roger came near her once, but not to

speak to her; he was bandying words with an animated acquaintance, a lady whom he had known in India.

"No, I am not what you would call musical," he admitted. "I sing after mess, but that is nothing, most fellows do, and I suppose I sing in tune, or else they would take off their boots, and shy them at me—but I must honestly confess, that classical music bores me. I like a stirring, rousing march, or a waltz; but when I hear what I don't like, I take for granted that it is what is called *good* music."

"Did any one ever hear such conversation at a musical party? Go away, you dreadful Goth!" cried the lady affectedly. "Go away, and take your heresy elsewhere."

Roger glanced at Rose and her solid barrier—he could not get near her—and said:

"You are well entrenched, I see, and Jacky is with you. I suppose he undermined the position—I wish *I* could do the same! But I could not crawl on all-fours without exciting remark. I suppose I dare not carry the sofa by assault? Don't forget the Botanical Gardens to-morrow."

"Roger," said Mrs. Skyler, coming up in great haste, "there is old Mrs. Wiggins, who has had no tea—she is furious. Luckily I just discovered it. For mercy sake, take her under your wing at once; the old woman over by the window, with the

ermine tippet. Do make yourself agreeable to her, and smooth her down."

Clara Skyler, busy as she was, had made a note of several small items. She had seen the dog, Jacky, ensconced by his former owner; she instantly resolved to issue an edict, that the kitchen should be his dwelling place in future; also, she had caught the words "Botanical Gardens, to-morrow;" and she had overheard the general talking to her cousin with extraordinary *bonhomie*—nay, he seemed quite warmly affectionate, as he accosted Roger and said:

"Well, Hope—this is a grand function! Did you see the *Gazette* to-day; and that fellow they have brought in from the zooth, shovelled him over the heads of about six others? *Monstrous!* And what do you think? I'm afraid I've discovered that that Blue Bermuda is a reprint. Come in and see it to-morrow morning, and give me your idea; if it turns out to be, what I suspect, you ought to let your friend know."

Yes, this wonderful intimacy must be extinguished at once. About seven o'clock people began to move; the Yaldwins departed, Rose affecting to have enjoyed herself extremely. Miserable hypocrite! In honest truth, she was sadly out of spirits; she could see that she was not fated to shine in society, and had, in her own

opinion, been eclipsed by every girl in the room—and especially by Clara Skyler (who was not a girl). She had watched her with Roger, and noted the variety of her by-play, and the power of expression of different kinds, she had put into her eyes ; no doubt, she would easily succeed in making him her slave.

“Don’t go yet, general,” pleaded the enchanting widow, accosting the party in the hall ; “Miss Yaldwin will see her grandmother home. I do *so* want to have a nice comfortable little chat with you ; we will go into the boudoir, whilst this duet is coming off, for I have done my duty, and now,” with a delightful smile, “I may take a little pleasure.”

The general admired “the little widow,” as he called her, and was fond of talking to her, and absorbing her flatteries ; in less than two minutes, they were in the boudoir alone.

“How well you are looking !” she exclaimed, gazing rapturously into his face ; “*so* much better than when I left home.”

“The same to you,” he rejoined, beaming genially under her blandishments.

“The Howards were asking about you most particularly ; they had often heard of you from their cousins in India, and were so interested to hear that I was a friend of yours. I suppose you know my cousin Roger ?”



"Oh, yes, I know Hope rather well."

"Pray, now, tell me candidly, what you think of him. I am most anxious to know your opinion of him," looking up into his grim visage, with quite a devout air.

"Oh, a smart, well-set-up fellow, none of your haw-haw, cane-sucking idiots. I like him."

"And he," with a significant smile, in which there was more malice, than mirth, "likes somebody."

"What do you mean?" staring interrogatively.

"I believe, if all tales be true—Morpingham is always full of stories—that he has taken an immense fancy to Miss Rose."

"Oh, stuff and nonsense!"

"Not stuff and nonsense, my dear general. You have often complimented me on being a clever and sharp-sighted woman—I always remember *your* praise—and lookers-on, see most of the game. Eh?"

"Game! What game?" he demanded savagely.

"Will you be very angry with poor little me, if I call it the stamp game?" was the truly brave reply.

The general recoiled against the window shutter, and glared—his feelings, were beyond the point of speech.

"Yes. Roger adds to your collection, does he not?" she asked in her most playful manner.

"He has certainly taken a wonderful interest in

my collection, and given me some excellent examples," replied the general, who had somewhat recovered his senses.

"These specimens he got from London?"

"Yes, from a friend of his, who is also a collector."

"A friend!" she repeated with a scornful laugh. "These stamps, are selected by an expert, and bought at a shop in the Strand. I picked up an open bill on the breakfast-room floor to-day, addressed to Captain Hope, and acknowledging receipt for £4 10s. from 'Sanders' Foreign Stamp Agency.'

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated her companion. "I had not the smallest idea of this."

"You thought he got them a present?" and she smiled, her mouth being very much down at one corner.

"I swear I did, though I cannot say that he ever said so. No, he never did: I took it for granted, like the old idiot I have been. I'll give them all back to him at once," he raged, as he walked about the room, "every man Jack of them, and a good piece of my mind as well."

"Don't, don't, dear general," raising her little hand imploringly. "If you do, you will get me into such a scrape, and I know you would not like to do *that*."

"Well, no. But do you really think, the young fellow is coming after Rose?"

"I think he flirts with her, from what I can hear, and if it came to anything, I should be so very, very, sorry for you. She is far too young, to know her own mind; and what would you do without her?"

"Oh, as to that," rather pompously, "we could manage quite well."

"I am sure—excuse me for contradicting you—that you could not, at least with any regard for your own comfort."

The general looked as black as a thunder-cloud, but Mrs. Skyler calmly continued:

"You see she attends on her grandmother entirely, sits with her, plays cards with her, and amuses her. She also does the housekeeping, I believe, and she reads to you, and writes some of your letters."

She paused between each remark, so as to give her listener ample time to digest these facts.

"If she leaves you, you will require a maid for Mrs. Yaldwin, of course, and also a lady-companion, an elderly woman, who will play cribbage with your wife, arrange her work, do the housekeeping, and read to you. Now, I really don't think that you and Mrs. Yaldwin would care to have a stranger, and a third party, always present—and yet she would be an absolute necessity."

As she had stated the case, the general's brow cleared, but his jaw became very long.

"She would—she would," he acquiesced after a considerable silence; "an infernally disagreeable necessity."

"Now," proceeded Mrs. Skyler in her glibest manner, "Rose is your own flesh and blood, she knows your ways, and *I* must say, that if she marries, and leaves you at present, she will be an ungrateful little monkey! She owes everything to you; you have reared her, and educated her, and that would be a poor reward. I am only speaking out of my strong affection for Mrs. Yaldwin and yourself," and this Sapphira the second, took the veteran's rugged hand in hers, and stroked it sympathetically.

"Oh, yes, of course," he assented; "but what the deuce am I to do? What do you suggest?"

"Discourage his visits; set your face sternly against his stamps; keep Rose at home. He will soon be going away, and it will blow over, and remember," with a finger on her lip, and a smile in her eyes, "remember, my dear general, mum is the word, just as if we were members of a court-martial."

"Yes," he answered with a somewhat harsh laugh, "we have had a court-martial on Hope—and broke him."

As Mrs. Skyler watched her late confidant, walking stiffly down the steps, she burst into an irrepressible laugh, and said half aloud :

"Ha, ha, Miss Rose Yaldwin! I flatter myself that I have put a pretty long spoke in *your* wheel."

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

"WHAT! NO MORE STAMPS?"

"I WENT in to see the general just now," said Roger to his aunt, "and he was quite grumpy. At first I thought it was the effect of having discovered a reprint, I had unfortunately given him, or, what upsets him terribly, a forgery amongst his own treasures; but it is something more than that. I cannot imagine how I have offended him, or why he was so short with me."

"Poor, dear old thing," ejaculated Clara in her drawling tone. "He is like that sometimes, even with *me*, but I never mind; I know it is only his liver. As for you, Roger, he could not afford to quarrel with his only disciple," she added with one of her most subtle smiles.

"At any rate he says that I need not take the trouble to get him any more stamps," returned her cousin impressively.

"What? No more stamps?" cried Mrs. Baggot; "then he must be in a very bad way. I suppose

he would not refuse, if you were to try him, with a blue ninepenny Natal!"

"One would think you were speaking of a fish, Aunt Polly. Annie," turning to Miss Baggot, "don't forget, that we are going to the Botanical Gardens this afternoon. We are to call next door at three o'clock sharp. It's an old engagement," he explained to Mrs. Skyler; "we want to look at the tropical ferns, and palms."

"To say nothing of *roses*," she rejoined with her most knowing air. "And won't you take poor little me?"

Mrs. Skyler was five feet six, but invariably spoke of herself as if she were a fairy.

"May I not join this small expedition?" she pleaded. "I am devoted to flowers, and quite crazy on the subject of ferns."

Annie deliberately laid down her knitting and gazed at her mendacious sister, with eyebrows almost elevated to the roots of her hair;—Clara knew a carnation from a dahlia, perhaps? There could be no openly expressed objection to Mrs. Skyler's society, and a party of five—a most uncomfortable number—duly started from No. 13. Of course Roger's original plan was spoiled; naturally he wished to walk with Rose, exchanging her for Annie with the general, as was his custom; now the general gallantly took charge of the two

unmarried ladies, and he was left to escort his cousin, the widow. In some inexplicable manner, he never had a chance of being with Rose; Clara was always close to his side, admiring, appealing and exclaiming, and hurrying him from plant to plant, and from house to house, with a haste that was almost headlong. Once, he did come across the others, and immediately addressed himself to Miss Yaldwin, but, alas! ere he had spoken three sentences, he heard a shrill little shriek. Clara had got a thorn into her finger, "Oh, *such* a nasty big one! No, no, she could not trust anyone to remove it but Cousin Roger, he had such good eyes, and nerves. Roger must come and take it out at once." The operation, proved to be a tedious business; there was a very minute puncture, but after a long and exhaustive search it seemed that there was no thorn to be extracted; at any rate Roger gave up the quest in some disgust. Half an hour had elapsed over this humbug, as he called it to himself, and the rest of the party were out of sight and on their way home, and he was condemned to another *tête-à-tête* walk with Clara.

Captain Hope remained a week longer in Morpington, and was afforded every opportunity of becoming well acquainted with his youngest cousin. He saw nothing of the Yaldwins, no more than if he had never known them; there were no

more pleasant walks, or even casual meetings in the street. Mrs. Skyler accompanied him to dances, concerts and tennis tournaments in spite of himself, and kept him in a perpetual whirl; appropriating him entirely as her own especial friend. She was a clever, unscrupulous, intriguing woman; only a clever woman, could have so contrived that, despite her cousin's determined effort to retain his intercourse with their next-door neighbours, he was always politely and effectually baffled. He felt as if he was entangled in some net, and not master of his own actions. He never suspected, that there was a traitor in his camp, and that when she divined his plans she could send in a hurried note to the general, saying, "R. is going in to see you this morning—be out," or, "If you go on the Mall you will meet R."

Roger became impatient of his position, and at length he suspected that his charming cousin Clara had something to say to it.

He recalled old Mrs. Yaldwin's warnings, "When Clara comes, we shall see no more of *you*." And in spite of Clara's appealing glances, and the soft allurements of friendship, he broke his bonds rather suddenly and went off to London. Clara was very agreeable, no doubt; but he found it difficult to resist the conclusion, that she was partly responsible for the wall of ice that had sprung up simultaneously



with her appearance on the scene, between him and his new friends. He had promised his aunt to return for Christmas, and he promised himself to undermine Clara's manœuvres. And Rose? She had seen all; Captain Hope and Mrs. Skyler were together day by day, she had noticed them going out and coming in, had seen them in that too tell-tale window: Captain Hope looking at some book, and Mrs. Skyler leaning affectionately over him, with her hand on his shoulder. Yes, he had quite abandoned them—and it was only what she had expected! He had been her grandfather's friend, of course, more than hers; but, still he was her friend too, he had said so. And she would always remember him gratefully.

Yes; *she* called it gratitude, for he had saved her from a great mistake; he had brought a sudden flood of sunshine into her poor starved life, and he had obtained a free pardon for Jacky.

The general had recently become surprisingly liberal to Rose; had opened his purse-strings and made her an allowance. She never suspected—nor did her unintentional benefactress—that she had to thank Clara Skyler for this. Her words had sunk into the general's heart; and in the main, he was a just old gentleman. If Rose accomplished the duties of companion and ladies' maid, she saved two salaries, and should have some remuneration

beyond mere board and lodging. He had noticed how shabby she looked at the musical party, totally different to other girls ; and Rose had an air about her, and the carriage of a lady ; it was all very fine for Jane Randall to say, " The girl will inherit her mother's extravagant ideas. Keep her down ; ten pounds a year is ample to spend on her dress, and give her threepence a week pocket money." Jane herself, had had a happy girlhood, and every indulgence and luxury. He knew that she was now at heart, a most grasping, avaricious woman ; and the more he saved, she imagined, the more there would be for *her*. He could not endure Jane's husband, a pompous county magnate, nor her two drawling, stuck-up, daughters ; but Jane and her children, had never disgraced him. People seemed to have forgotten that other business now ; indeed, he had recently received a letter from Rose's uncle, a wealthy Midland squire, expressing a wish that she should visit them. All very fine, after thirteen years. Some one, perhaps, had told him that the girl was a Standish, which was true ; and a beauty, which was also a fact ; he merely inclosed the invitation in an envelope, and sent it back by return of post.

Rose must have an allowance—how much ? he wondered in a vague manner. He marched in next door, and finding Mrs. Baggot alone, immediately proceeded to cross-examine her on the subject.

"I am going to make Rose an allowance," he remarked; "for her dress, you understand; and I want to talk to you about the matter."

"Well, indeed, general," said the plain-spoken lady, "you are not giving it a day too soon. I hope you mean to allow her something substantial; it's a mistake to bring up girls in absolute ignorance of the value of money; and besides, you are a rich man, and Rose is a beauty."

Her visitor waved his hand impatiently, and said:

"Mrs. Skyler is always well turned out: now I would like Rose to dress something in that style—tasteful, quiet, and ladylike."

"Oh, my poor, dear, simple man!" cried Mrs. Baggot, raising both her plump hands, with a gesture of commiseration, "do you know what you are saying? Clara spends four hundred a year on her clothes, and odds and ends, if she spends a penny."

The general fixed his eyes steadily on Mrs. Baggot, to see if she was joking? No, she appeared to be unusually serious.

"Why, even Annie," she continued volubly, "who has two hundred a year of her own, and always looks as if her things were secondhand, *she* fritters away about eighty pounds. As to myself—" she paused, and cleared her throat, and

returned afresh to the charge. "To give you some idea, of what dress costs, this gown on me was fifteen guineas, plain as it looks; my shoes," exhibiting a ready foot, "were thirty-five shillings, at Hook's; my stockings—I always wear silk—cost eighteen shillings."

"Oh; that will do!" interrupted the general, rising hastily to his feet. "I am indeed a poor simple old man! I came in to ask for information that would be some guide to a person of *moderate* means; not to listen to a confession, of insane extravagance."

"Thank you very much, general," returned Mrs. Baggot, with unruffled good humour. "What do you say, to a woman, who gives ninety pounds for a sealskin cloak?"

"I say, Hanwell Lunatic Asylum," he rejoined with laconic severity.

"Then what will you say, to a man, who gives one hundred guineas for two dirty little sticky stamps; where is *he* to be incarcerated? There is sense in the warm fur cloak, it keeps out the cold; but a stamp would not go far in that way, eh!"

The only audible reply the general vouchsafed to this query, was the loud banging after him, of the drawing-room door.

Rose was amazed, when her grandfather summoned her into the study the next morning, to find

that she was not to receive, as she expected, a severe wiggling about some housekeeping shortcoming, but to be presented with a cheque.

"Look here," he began, "I don't like to see you dressed like a housemaid. I had no idea that women's clothes cost so much. I remember when I only paid five pounds for a silk dress for your grandmother ; however, times have changed, and I am going to allow you sixty pounds a year ; yes, and more, if you want it. Here is thirty pounds now ; but if I ever catch you sending a penny to that hunk, I don't know what I won't do to you ; it will be worse for you, bear *that* in mind."

Rose received the money in wide-eyed astonishment, muttered a few words of thanks ; and boldly despatched ten pounds of her newly-acquired riches to Hubert by the very next mail.

She was accorded much more liberty than formerly.

Mrs. Skyler's remarks had burned into the general's mind. Rose was useful ; Rose was worth her salt. Rose (though she should *never* know it) was invaluable. As for Hope, that was all the little widow's imagination. Women were so ready to jump at matrimonial conclusions. Men were not so easily got hold of ! it was different when *he* was a young man, he said to himself, with a profound sigh.

Meanwhile Rose, was often permitted to go for walks with Annie, who took her to the best shops and gave her the best advice with respect to her numerous purchases. Rose enjoyed these outings extremely, but would have shrunk from confessing, even to herself, why she found them so pleasant.

Among other topics, such as the price of furs, stockings and serge, Annie talked of Roger ; he had sent his adieux to Miss Yaldwin by her, and begged her to say how sorry he was not to find her at home when he called, but that he hoped to be more fortunate at Christmas. Yes, he was coming down at Christmas ; and Rose found herself looking forward to the end of the year, with unparalleled interest and anticipation.

Mrs. Yaldwin, who had been failing for many months, now became entirely bedridden, and her granddaughter spent most of her time in her room ; the old lady was suffering no pain, it was only a gradual break up, of what had never been a strong constitution. Mrs. Baggot, hale, brisk, and juvenile, visited her frequently, and assured the general authoritatively, that he must immediately engage a nurse, unless he wished to have two members of his family bedridden. The general wondered that this had not occurred to him before, and secured an efficient attendant at once ; he had become much less formidable of late, and people

could now venture to make suggestions, without being subsequently compelled to turn and flee. Mrs. Skyler called occasionally at No. 13, and paid a hurried visit ; she made a few snubbing, stinging speeches to Rose, remarked in great astonishment on her smart dresses—little did she guess, that she was herself responsible, for this bright new weapon in her rival's hand—and sarcastically begged for her milliner's address. Then she flattered her dear general, and glanced at his latest stamps, and generally left him in high good-humour, and with an increased opinion of himself ; and Rose, with hot cheeks, and a smarting soul. In a delicate, subtle way—which was as an unknown language, to the plain old soldier—this amiable woman, contrived to convey to the girl, that she pitied her, and disapproved of her ; that she had been sly, scheming, and susceptible, and serenely hinted her opinion, that she had angled shamelessly for Roger Hope, —and lost him !

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## CHAPTER XIX.

## STEALING A MARCH.

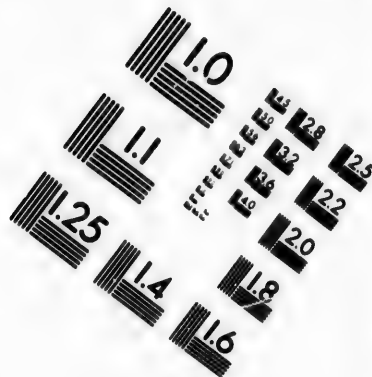
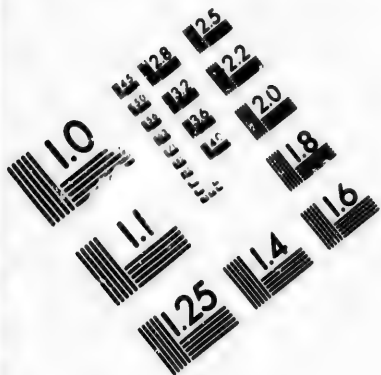
CHRISTMAS, however frosty, always seemed to thaw General Yaldwin's heart ; he was liberal in tips, he made presents to his next-door neighbours, there was holly about the grim drawing-room, and a monster turkey hanging in the larder.

On Christmas morning he actually kissed Rose—that is to say, he rubbed his moustache in the vicinity of her left eye—and told her that after breakfast she was to go and see what her grandmother had for her. A pair of gloves or a veil were the limit of her expectations, but she was wrong; the old lady, who was propped up in bed, with feeble hands and the intense sympathy of the nurse, placed a lovely sable boa round Rose's neck, and a pair of gold bangles on her wrists. Her granddaughter was in ecstasies; these were just the things she had always longed for; how could grandmamma guess? Grandmamma had consulted Annie Baggot, and these were the excellent results. As Miss Yaldwin, wearing her new boa, stepped out briskly through the snow, *en route* to church, that Christmas morning, she felt happy, and her happiness was reflected in her face. Roger was not in church, but as they walked home together, Annie had informed her, that he was expected in the afternoon. Mrs. Skyler spoke a few words to the Yaldwins outside their gate, and stared long and fixedly at Rose; certainly a sable boa looks to great advantage under a prettily-rounded chin, dress works wonders, and Mrs. Skyler felt more respect for the girl than she had ever done before. Roger arrived by the afternoon mail, and as soon as he had exchanged greetings with

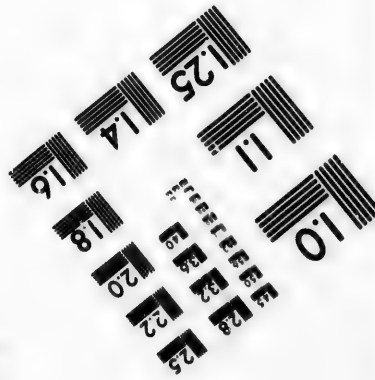
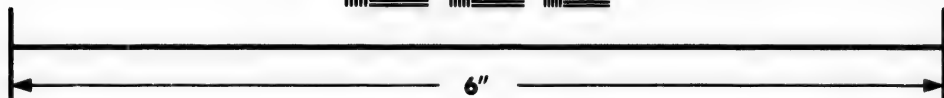
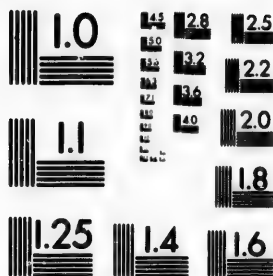


his relations, and presented his offerings, he hastened in to No. 13. Surely on Christmas Day there could be no ill-feeling, and he was resolved not to stand any nonsense *this* time. Alas for his determination! Mrs. Skyler accompanied him, volunteered her escort in her pleasantest manner; imploring him in her playful way, "not to go without poor little me." In company with "poor little me," the visit was paid, and he saw his divinity looking prettier than ever, most fashionably dressed, and undoubtedly pleased to see him, but he scarcely succeeded in exchanging a dozen words with her. The general talked to him incessantly about army news, and the chances of a row on the frontier, and the prospect of an advance on Meshed or Herat; the Transcaspian railway was discussed at great length, and Rose heard with dismay that Captain Hope expected to be ordered off at any moment; there was a certain amount of conversation about stamps, and then Mrs. Skyler made a signal for departure, and alas! it had been just like any ordinary formal call, and Rose could have gone up to her own room and wept. But instead of this, she had to spend a couple of hours with her grandmother in order to allow the nurse to go and see her friends. As for Roger, he struggled frantically, but in vain, to break through the meshes in which Clara had once more





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entangled him. She appeared to have apportioned every hour of his day, and repeatedly reminded him that, "Your visit is to *us*, you know; your time is short, and *we* really cannot spare you.' She laid herself out to charm him never so wisely; but she failed in her project when she threw out dark hints respecting a family disgrace next door, and mentioned in casual conversation, what an awful temper Rose Yaldwin had, and that she and her grandfather fought like a cat and dog, and it was all her fault, every one declared. But as Roger was behind the scenes, he was entrenched from these poisoned arrows as in a fastness, and he noticed that when his cousin recalled all her fair neighbour's unpleasant little attributes, she squinted in a most unbecoming manner, and he began to take a decided, though secret, aversion to the charming but malicious Clara. It was truly a case of so near and yet so far; when the general called he was unfortunately out, and when he escaped from Clara and hurried next door, the general was from home, and, face to face with Leach's grim visage, he could not ask for Miss Yaldwin. He seemed to be baffled so easily, that he could have laughed, only he felt quite desperate, and furious. He had come down to Morpington to see a certain girl, he had been four days in the next house, and only met her once, and exchanged a dozen words with her.

On the other hand, he saw more than enough of Clara Skyler; she sat over the fire with him, and talked to him confidentially, and flattered him discreetly; she took him for long walks, or to musical teas, and scarcely let him out of her sight. Mrs. Baggot and Annie looked on in the characters of neutral spectators, and marvelled to one another as to how it would all end? Clara was very strong, they knew, and a most determined woman; but could she marry a man against his will—a man who was desperately in love with a girl in the very next house? Alas, according to Mrs. Baggot's experience, such things had been. People may think Roger Hope a poor, week-kneed creature, and a feeble-minded idiot, but he was nothing of the sort; unfortunately for him, he was not nearly as clever, or as full of resource (and lies) as his cousin, and he had a sensitive horror of hurting anyone's feelings, especially a woman's; and when Clara appealed to him to take her out one day, and he had made a gallant stand, and politely excused himself, she had turned upon him a pair of eyes swimming in tears, and said in a broken voice, "There are so—so few people I really care for, so few who understand me, so few who sympathize with me, and I *did* think you and I were going to be such friends," and then slowly left the room, sobbing softly to herself. Of course Roger felt

that he was a brute, and of course he apologised, and "never did it again."

After five blank days, fortune and fate smiled on him! He had cherished a distracted vision of waiting on the general, and formally asking for Miss Yaldwin's hand—but he had not obtained the young lady's views on the subject, and Clara had assured him that as long as he lived, the general would never permit Rose to marry. One drizzling afternoon, the captive escaped to the club, accompanied by Jacky, who had also revisited Morpington. As he stood on the steps, he saw a girl laden with books hurry into the library across the street. In less than a minute he was beside her.

"Miss Yaldwin," he exclaimed, "I am delighted to see you. Let me carry your books. You are exchanging them, of course? Perhaps you will allow me to help you choose some others. I know where all the new novels are to be found."

"Very likely; but I am not in search of fiction just at present. Grandpapa wants bound volumes of the *Asiatic Review* and some dry old work about the Tartar invasion," she answered, as they walked side by side into the long library. It proved to be empty, and here was indeed a chance for Roger at last!

"How is it," he enquired, "that I never see you

now? I have been next door to you for five days. I have called almost daily; but I am never admitted. Leach does not approve of me, I can see. But, joking apart, what have I done to offend your grandfather?"

"Nothing, I am certain," she answered colouring; "but we are generally out when you come."

"But I have called at all hours," he persisted. "There seems a fatality against our meeting. I can't understand it."

Rose coloured a shade deeper. She understood all about it perfectly.

"And how are you getting on now?" he continued.

"Very well, thank you."

"And your brother?"

"Oh, only pretty well, I'm afraid," meeting his gaze with bright, moist eyes. "I sometimes think that I may one day go out and keep house for him, as you suggested. Do you remember?"

He remembered; but when he had made the suggestion, Hubert was about the last person he had in his mind. "But would your grandfather spare you?" he asked incredulously. If spared to Hubert, why not to *him*?

"I don't know. Of course I could not leave grannie at present, and as long as she wants me I shall stay with her."



"And your grandfather—is he in a milder mood than formerly?"

"He is very kind to me now, and only think! he is going to take me to the ball on the eighteenth."

"Hurrah! you don't really say so!"

"Yes. The duke is coming to open the new town hall, and as grandpapa is on the committee he is obliged to be present; and I am to go too." She paused to bow to two ladies who had recently entered, and under pretence of looking at magazines, were closely studying her and her companion.

"Your first dance, of course? I hope I shall be here for it, but I may be telegraphed for any day. I shall be uncommonly sorry to go. I've never cared a straw before."

"Have you not? Of course he is thinking of Clara," she mentally remarked.

"And about this ball on Thursday? How many dances may I have? The first waltz and three others—and supper?"

"Oh, Captain Hope—so many?"

"You will, no doubt, have hosts of clamouring partners; but remember, it will be my last dance in England for many a day."

"I will remember," she replied, and her face fell.

"Go *out*, Jacky!" roared the young man to

Jacky, who, in the condition of a muddy doormat, came trotting briskly up the room. "I left you at the club. Don't you know, sir, that dogs are not allowed in here?"

Jacky pleaded with his eyes and crouched abjectly, and then turned, and travelled dejectedly away.

"I wonder you brought him down again," said Rose.

"Oh, he wished to revisit his old haunts before leaving his native land, and he wanted to say good-bye to you."

"But surely you are not taking him out to India?"

"Of course I am—do you suppose that I would give away your grandfather's present? And—I have another reason besides."

(There were twenty people in the library now, chiefly elderly ladies. He dared not speak out. As it was, this interview was being conducted under the strictest surveillance.)

"What can that be?" she asked innocently.

"Can you not guess?" he returned, with considerable significance.

Rose poked the carpet nervously with her damp umbrella, and made no reply. It could not be possible, that he was carrying Jacky round the globe because he had been her dog!

"My aunt is going to ask you and your grand-

father to a little family dinner on Tuesday," resumed her companion, "with a round game of cards to follow. I rely upon you to persuade him, and to break the spell that seems to lie over Nos. 13 and 15."

"I will do my best," she answered; "but I have not much influence with grandpapa—nothing in comparison to Mrs. Skyler."

"Nonsense! How extraordinary! I should have thought that he was quite impervious to her fascinations—absolutely fireproof—all his feelings securely stored up in a patent Chubb-locked safe. And here comes Annie."

At this moment Miss Baggot, clad in a long moist mackintosh, came tramping towards them, bearing a huge bunch of mistletoe in her hand, with an air of triumphant complacency.

"Good gracious, Annie!" cried her cousin, in a tone of affected horror. "Have you been walking about the town with that?" pointing to her burden. "What rashness—not to mention the impropriety of the thing, and the temptation you have been putting in people's way!"

"Oh, I got it at a greengrocer's across the road—a bargain," she answered serenely. "Clara told me to be sure, and not come back without it, and here it is."

"And better late than never, eh? Well, we will all

escort it home in a cab. Miss Yaldwin and I have too much respect for ourselves, to be seen with you on foot. And now, shall we choose some books?"

There was a good deal of talking and joking over the selection, which proved to be an unusually tedious business; but when it was successfully accomplished, Roger insisted on the two ladies having tea with him at a well-known confectioner's. Annie did the honours with zeal, and was surprisingly facetious and talkative. It was a right merry meal—thoroughly enjoyed by all (including Jacky, who gorged himself with buttered muffins, and shortbread). When it was over, they rattled off in a fly in the highest spirits, with Jacky under the seat, the mistletoe trailing from the window, and Roger saying to himself: "Come, this is like old times!" and proudly conscious of having stolen a march on Clara, hoping that Rose understood him, and that they would make it all right at the ball. Rose, on her part, was keenly alive to the fact that, despite the rain and mud and an impending scolding, she had spent a delightful afternoon, and was supremely happy. As for Annie, she was as proud as the traditional peacock. She felt that she was enacting the part of a benevolent fairy to these two young people, and that if Clara could but see her now, she would scarcely call her—as she had done that very morning—"a *harmless* imbecile!"

## CHAPTER XX.

## KEEPING THE CAB WAITING.

"The accident, of an accident."

—LORD THURLOW.

THE little dinner with a round game to follow, thanks to the artifices of Clara Skyler, never came off; and it so happened, also thanks to Clara Skyler, that Roger and Rose saw nothing of one another until the day of the ball. It was a most unpromising afternoon—the keen wintry blast seemed to penetrate to the very bone. It was beginning to sleet, and Rose was hastening in through the garden gate—her grandfather had the latch-key already in the door—when Captain Hope eagerly accosted her.

"Good afternoon, Miss Yaldwin; I have just had a telegram, and I'm off by the mail to-morrow morning,"

"Oh, are you?" she rejoined rather blankly.

"Yes; sail in the 'Euphrates' on Saturday; not an hour to spare. I say," coming a step closer, and speaking in a low and impressive tone, "you will be certain to come to-night—nothing will prevent you? Promise me," he urged, looking at her steadily.

"I promise you," she answered, with a somewhat nervous laugh. "You seem to forget that it is my first ball, and I shall be only too anxious to go."

"I know, I know; but I have a particular reason—that I am sure you must guess—something I must say to you, and——"

"Rose! what are you about?" bawled the general from the steps. "What the deuce do you mean by keeping the door open in this way?"

And Rose, whose duty it was to accord instant obedience, with a quick little nod to her companion, turned and ran up the path, and into the house, with a heightened colour.

"Never mind," said Hope to himself as he entered No. 15, "there is a good time coming. I wonder if those bouquets have turned up yet?"

Meanwhile the general now sorely repented him of his promise respecting the ball; nevertheless, he intended to stick to his word, like a man of honour and a soldier.

"What on earth, does an old fellow of my age, want going to these tomfooleries?" he demanded irritably of his grandchild; "wearing an evening coat, and a pair of tight boots, and white kid gloves, in order to watch a pack of idiots capering round the room? Catch me, ever at another such 'Tamasha.' The only comfort is, that Scholes and Wapshott are bound to be there, and they hate it

even worse than I do. There is nothing for *us* to do all night, but stand about in draughts, and do our best to catch our deaths of cold."

"There will be the supper," suggested Rose, with the simplicity of nineteen years.

"Supper!" he repeated ferociously; "why don't you say suicide at once, miss? Do you suppose that *I* am a likely person to while away the time—and my few remaining days—in consuming watery lobster-salad, stale tarts, or even slices of fat ham? I know a ball supper. Pah!"

"Well, at least you will get a rubber of whist," she ventured, timidly; "and you will like that."

"I shall like nothing about it," he answered morosely. He further informed her, that he would not dress until after dinner; there was lots of time before eleven o'clock.

This was a perfectly natural arrangement for an old gentleman, who was not engaged for the first dance, but Rose piteously explained that "they were invited for half-past nine, sharp; besides, that being on the committee, he was supposed to be punctual, in order to receive the guests."

"Be hanged to it, so I have! and I'd give ten pounds down to get out of the whole thing. Well, send word to Collins to be here at half-past nine to the minute;" and after issuing this command, the general relapsed into awe-aspiring gloom.

Dinner was a dismal meal, eaten in a silence punctuated by the general's angry sighs, and Leach's deferentially tendered wines and dishes. As soon as it had come to an end, Rose flew up to her own room, eager to partake of the first delights of her first dance.

Yes, there was her fresh white gauze and satin dress laid out on the bed in all its glory, not to speak of its proper accompaniment of gloves, shoes, lace handkerchief, and fan.

Two candles illuminated the dressing-table, and Carter, the housemaid, was in attendance as ladies'-maid for this unusual occasion.

And now the delightful operation of preparing for the ball commenced. "How neat her shoes were ; how well her dress fitted !" thought Rose—her first low body ! Yes, and "she had done her hair most beautiful," so Carter assured her, adding the criticism that "any one would think as them back twists was put on false." At last she was ready, and she really could not help smiling at her own radiant face in the glass—and to her question,

"If she was all right?" Carter replied with enthusiasm :

"Lawks, Miss Rose ! I never saw anythink so pretty. I'd never—never 'ave known you !"

"Fine feathers make fine birds, don't they, Carter?" rejoined the young lady modestly, and



with a last glance at her reflection and a happy sigh, she rustled downstairs to show herself to her grandmamma.

The old lady was as usual propped up in bed, with a shawl over her shoulders and her ear-trumpet beside her. Having deliberately assumed her glasses she proceeded to inspect her granddaughter with immense interest. Rose was obliged to turn slowly round and round, to walk up and down the room. At last Mrs. Yaldwin was satisfied.

"She looks nice, doesn't she, Dixon?" (Dixon was the nurse.) "I believe she is very like what I was as a girl, only not quite so fair."

Here indeed was a sermon, in a few words, on the transient existence of natural charms, had Rose been in a frame of mind to meditate on such matters; but Rose was far too intent upon the ecstasies of the present moment, to spare one thought to either past or future.

How could she bring home to herself the cruel lesson that life was but a fleeting show: that the fair, young, brilliant creature she saw reflected in the cheval glass, would one day resemble the shrivelled, wrinkled, bedridden old woman who was now watching her with sunken envious eyes?

"Dear me! It seems only the other day since *I* was going to my first ball," whimpered Mrs. Yaldwin; "and *I* wore white satin too! Ah! dear

me, dear me ! Well, I hope you will have a very pleasant evening, Rose—one you can look back on all your life. If you only had a lover now, the whole thing would be perfect."

Carter and Dixon exchanged furtive glances. Captain Hope's attentions had been frequently discussed below stairs.

Mrs. Yaldwin, who was unquestionably foolish at times, and had always been of a romantic turn, continued in her shrill, chirruping voice :

"What's that your grandfather was telling me, about that young man who brings him stamps? You know who I mean—the one who *shouts* so dreadfully."

"Oh, grandmamma !" protested Rose, covered with confusion and blushes.

"Well, well, come here. Dixon, where's that brooch? Just hold the candle. Now come quite close, Rose ; I am going to lend you—only *lend* you, mind—my diamond brooch, it will look well in the tucker of your frock—Jane was asking about it, but she shan't get it."

And with trembling, fumbling fingers, the old lady pinned the brilliants into the front of the girl's satin bodice.

"I will give it to you some day—not now ; I expect to wear it again myself, eh, Dixon? I remember I wore it for the first time at the Governor-

general's ball at Calcutta. There now I am tired. Kiss me, and go away and enjoy yourself, and be sure and come and tell me all about it to-morrow."

Rose promised faithfully. As she went downstairs she saw the servants peeping over the balustrade that led to the lower regions, and heard exclamations such as, "Laws! Don't she look splendid!" emanating from the cook and kitchen-maid. She glanced eagerly at the hall clock; it was on the stroke of half-past nine; she heard the fly stop at the gate—Collins was always to the minute—her heart beat high; she felt half-choked with various strange, and delightful, emotions, as she turned the handle of the dining-room door, and walked in.

\* \* \* \* \*

But what was this? Truly a change came o'er the spirit of her dream, when her eyes fell on the table, still littered with dessert, her grandfather in his usual attire, with his silk handkerchief spread over his face, lying back in his chair asleep and—snoring—gentle, comfortable snores. And it was half-past nine o'clock, and fully time to start. But this, alas, was not the worst. When General Yaldwin fell asleep, be it after dinner or at any other period, no one, save the mynar, dared awake him. He always maintained that he slept so miserably, that these occasional forty winks of his were price-

less. Poor Rose! She sat down and looked at the clock in despair. She herself was ready to the very last button of her glove. How long would he sleep? How long would he take to dress? These were the vital questions, that she debated with feverish anxiety. She had known him to sleep for twenty minutes, and she had known these naps to be prolonged for hours.

Presently Leach entered, and began to remove the dessert things, as it were, secretly and silently. Oh, how she wished he would break a decanter, or anything. He then proceeded to make up the fire with the caution of a conspirator. Why did he not let the poker fall with a clang? If he would she would thankfully give him a golden sovereign from her scanty store. Were not moments to her as valuable as untold gold? Unfortunately for the agonized girl, Leach was an old soldier, and the general was his master, his superior officer, his idol, his graven image; he would not awake him purposely for half a year's pension.

Alas, it was now a quarter to ten. Rose watched the slow gilt hands travelling along the black dial until they came to ten o'clock. She was aware of the brisk driving of carriages—the people from next door had long departed; she had heard the gate clang, and the cab move off.

Oh, this was maddening, to sit powerless, and

losing all this precious time, watching a black marble timepiece, and listening to an old man's long-drawn snores !

At length the patient Collins sent in a respectful message, "He had another fare, and must go, but would return without fail within half-an-hour," and soon afterwards he rattled away. It was now half-past ten. If the general would but wake all was not yet lost ; he could easily dress in ten minutes—*his* hair would not take long to arrange—but no, he slept and snored on. Collins returned in the most honourable manner, at eleven to the minute, and rang a rousing peal. Rose opened the door and went out to him herself, clad in all the glories of her new white fur-trimmed opera cloak.

"The general is not ready yet," she explained ; "if you will wait a little, I will give you ten shillings out of my own pocket."

"I'm afraid you'll be very late, ma'am," replied Collins ; "the rooms was crammed to the door when I took Mrs. Duke just now. It's a bitter night to keep the horse standing ; being my own property, you see——"

"I am very sorry ; but surely you have a rug. Oh, please *do* wait ?" she urged almost tearfully.

Leach, who highly disapproved of this long conference and open door, now came forward and said :

"You will catch your death of cold, miss. Go in. I have all his things laid out ready, and the hot water ready to take up in one minute."

"You *will* wait a little, Collins!" she entreated.

"Well, miss," moved by her pretty, piteous face and eyes, in which two tears were twinkling, "I'll do my best; but I have other jobs to bring home about half-past twelve—supper or no supper—and a fare from next door to catch the three o'clock express to-morrow morning."

"A fare from next door to catch the three o'clock express!" Of course it was Captain Hope, and Collins would drive him away, and she would never, never see him again.

She returned to the dining-room, and in desperation ventured to move the chairs about, and to give the fire shovel a timid push; but it was all of no avail. General Yaldwin continued to slumber like an infant, his head thrown back, his mouth open, his legs extended, and his hands lightly crossed above the seat of hunger. Meanwhile Rose sat and watched him, her heart palpitating with sickening suspense.

It was now half-past eleven—a quarter to twelve—and then twelve chimed solemnly from a neighbouring church clock.

Twelve strokes, as fatal to poor Rose as the same hour to immortal Cinderella, for, as the last clanged

out, Collins, the long-suffering, drove remorselessly away. Yes, it was all over, her chance of going to the ball, and her last opportunity of seeing Roger Hope before he sailed for India, and leaning her head on her hands, Rose's long pent-up feelings found an outlet, and she burst into tears. She lay softly sobbing, with her arms on the table, until she gradually cried herself to sleep, and thus forgot all her sorrows. She dreamt that she was in a splendidly illuminated hall, thronged with people, all gaily dressed in evening costume, and among the crowd she saw Captain Hope, always endeavouring to approach her, and always, just as their hands touched, being swept away.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### QUITE A BRIDAL BOUQUET.

" Ah, let not hope prevail,  
Lest disappointment follow."

—MISS WROTHER.

AND how had Captain Hope spent the evening? Not as satisfactorily as he had anticipated, as may be readily imagined. His cousin Clara, was another individual, to whom the great ball of the season had proved an unqualified disappointment.

Mrs. Skyler had taken time by the forelock, and

had arrayed herself in full evening costume before dinner, believing that by this arrangement, she would ensure a *tête-à-tête* with Roger whilst her mother and Annie were making their toilettes.

Annie had inspected her sister's premature magnificence, with immensely elevated eyebrows, and had listened to her plausible excuses "that Wickes could not possibly attire three people at the same time, and therefore she had sacrificed her own inclinations and dressed thus early, so as to be out of the way."

For Clara to inconvenience herself, to get out of any one's way, was an event that had at least the merit of novelty, and Annie appended a mental rider to the effect: "She wants *us* out of the way, that is the real truth," and Annie's surmises, were correct.

As Clara sat alone by the drawing-room fire, slowly sipping her coffee, her reflections were not altogether disagreeable, judging by the expression of her eyes—which were intently fixed upon the blazing coals—she was thinking:

"I am looking my very best to-night—no one would take me for more than six-and-twenty. Roger has promised to write to me; he has made no attempt to meet that girl next door. He has not spoken to her this time—except the day I escorted him in there—he has forgotten her. Just like



a man ! And he is certainly contemplating matrimony, for I heard him pumping mother about girls going out to India to be married, and about outfits, and housekeeping. Yes, if I play my cards well, good-bye to England, damp and debt ! I shall turn over a new leaf, and begin a fresh chapter in my life."

She rose suddenly, put down her cup, threw off her opera mantle, and walked over to a long mirror, in which she surveyed herself dispassionately. "Yes, not more than six-and-twenty," she murmured ; "and Cérise has surpassed herself this time," slowly revolving for her own inspection. "She will charge me something frightful, but, after all, a good cut is everything ; and perhaps"—with a smile at herself—"it will come in for the trousseau." Undoubtedly, Mrs. Skyler was looking well, and was wearing a superb gown, a yellow brocade, which fitted her admirably ; and from the diamonds twinkling in her hair, to her yellow satin shoes, her toilette was perfection.

"What can be keeping him ?" she continued impatiently. "Of course he is packing—here he comes at last !" and she had just time to reseal herself as Roger entered.

"Well !" she exclaimed, "you have been putting up your traps, I suppose. I dressed early so as to have you all to myself, even for a little time, this

*last* evening. We can have a nice comfortable talk, whilst mother is adorning, and Annie, poor dear, is disfiguring herself! *Her* idea of an evening toilette is a high black grenadine, with a velvet rosette in her hair. She always looks her worst in a ball-room," continued her amiable sister complacently.

"Ah," said Roger, who was fond of Annie, "we cannot all be handsome, and her attractions are not exactly on the surface."

"No. She is safe from any perils which beset the fatal gift of beauty," rejoined Clara with a sneer. "And," rising and spreading out her hands to the fire and looking at her cousin with her head over her shoulder, she said, with her most coquettish air, "pray what do you say to my gown, Roger? What do you think of *me*?"

"I'm not much of a judge," he answered awkwardly; "but you look ripping."

"See," she continued, producing a programme, which she dangled playfully before him, "see what a pretty thing I have got! I always secure one on the sly; it prevents one being worried by bores. Now, how many shall I put you down for? Shall we say three?" taking her pencil, "two, and five, and eleven?"

"Yes, with pleasure," responded her companion, and never had he uttered a more stupendous falsehood.

"I wonder if those people are really going from next door?" she continued; "the old tiger, and his ewe lamb."

"You mean the general, and Miss Yaldwin?" said Roger in his most matter-of-fact style.

"*Don't* be so silly. Of course I do. It's a pity no good Samaritan will rescue that wretched girl, and take her out to dances. But people don't want stupid young women. Most of them have half a dozen of their own, and cannot be bothered."

"No; I suppose not. Who was it that said, there would be plenty of good Samaritans, were it not for the twopence and the oil? However, the general is going to escort his granddaughter to this dance himself."

"Yes; I heard something of it from Annie," said Clara indifferently; "and I shall only believe in it, when I see it."

"Oh, here are the flowers at last," remarked Roger, as a parlour-maid now entered with a large box; "and just in the nick of time."

"Bouquets! How too sweet of you," cried Clara, clasping her hands affectedly. "I am so fond of a large bouquet. I can walk into a room behind one with any amount of confidence, and besides it is such a capital screen."

Meanwhile her cousin had been busily occupied

in unpacking the flowers, and now exhibited three choice bouquets, fresh from a London florist.

"First come first served," he said. "Take your choice Clara, though I don't think that there is a pin to choose between them."

"Oh, they are positively too tempting," sniffing them in turn. After a long, and exhaustive inspection, she said: "With a million thanks, I'll have the camellias and violets; but"—starting as if she had seen a snake—"there is still another in the box, Roger. Did you know? They must have sent it by mistake," and, diving her hand for it, she triumphantly produced number four. "What a dream! All pure white! How too exquisite!" she exclaimed rapturously. Mentally she was saying, "If this is for that girl, it will be worse for her."

"It's all right," rejoined Roger, with tranquil self-possession; "that one is for Miss Yaldwin."

"Miss Yaldwin," repeated Clara, with slow distinct utterance, as if she had never heard the name before; and there was a moment's expressive silence. "Is *this* a new form of attention to the general?" she asked sarcastically, now throwing down her own bouquet, and taking up the other in its place.

"No."

"And," twisting it round, and round, in her

shaking hands," *quite* bridal, I declare. Do coming events cast their shadows before?" and she looked across the flowers, with an interrogative squint.

"What was the matter with Clara?" her cousin asked himself nervously. She was often a little odd in her manner; to-day she had been specially restless and eccentric, and now there was a hard ring in her voice that made him feel excessively uncomfortable. Oh, for an interruption! Instead of saying, "Night, or Blücher," he inwardly ejaculated, "My aunt, or the fly."

Mrs. Skyler walked to the door with a determined air, opened it, looked out, and then sailed back to the fireplace, and with a wave of the white bouquet summoned her cousin to approach. "You have a liking—a *sneaking* liking—for Rose Yaldwin," she began abruptly. "You think she is a cross between a martyr, and an angel. Dear me, how she has thrown dust in your eyes, and made an utter fool of you. She is an odious creature! I could tell you pretty stories about her if I liked, but I won't!" she concluded, in a fierce concentrated voice.

"Thank you," replied Roger, stiffly; "I will take the will for the deed."

"Oh, Roger!" she burst out, "how can you look at me so—so unkindly—and speak to me in such a tone, when this may be the last time, we may ever meet—yes, the very last time?" And Mrs. Skyler

sank into a chair in a becoming attitude, covered her face with her hands, and allowed the delicate white bouquet, to tumble into the fender.

Roger picked it up carefully, and said, "I have no wish to quarrel with you, Clara. You may be sure, that I have no desire to carry away from here, where I have spent such happy days, anything but pleasant memories—pleasant memories of every one—and here comes my aunt."

As Mrs. Baggot rustled slowly into the room with an air of conscious self-approval, she was followed by Annie in a smart low gown, with her hair dressed in the newest fashion, and who, at the first glance, had struck Roger as a somewhat ill-favoured stranger. Mrs. Skyler recovered her self-possession in a surprising manner, and at once fell into raptures over her mother's appearance. The bouquets were duly admired and appropriated, and Roger's thoughtfulness in including Rose in his floral offerings, was warmly commended, especially by Mrs. Baggot.

"Don't send it in next door, Roger," was her advice ; "it would shock Leach ! He would think it might be followed up by a train of bridesmaids, or take it down to the kitchen to talk it over with the cook, and ask if it was to be delivered, or given to the greengrocer ? I'll put it in a basket, and we will carry it to the ball, and keep it for Rose in the

ladies' room, and present it to her when she arrives. I hear their cab driving off now."

This was perfectly true, but the good lady little suspected, that the cab was empty.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

"SHE COMETH NOT, HE SAID."

"Thus grief still treads upon the heels of pleasure."

—CONGREVE.

HAVING carefully packed his relations, with their three bouquets, into the fly, and ascended the box himself, Roger drove off to this much-anticipated ball.

"Were they late?" he wondered anxiously, as they at last drew up in their turn under the great new porch of the Town Hall.

The band was playing briskly, and through an opening he caught glimpses of gyrating figures.

"Oh, it's all right," said Clara reassuringly; "it's only an extra just to try the floor, it's not on the programme, so you may have it. I shall not be a second taking off my cloak; wait outside the door of the ladies' room and I will join you."

There was no getting out of this arrangement, and Roger accepted his fate with an air of calm resignation.

After the extra he walked about with his cousin on his arm, in order, as she said, to look at the decorations and the people; but Roger's attention was entirely devoted to the latter. He was eagerly scrutinizing every group, in hopes of catching sight of the general's hooked nose, and military figure—not to speak of the general's fair companion; but, alas! his quick soldier eye roved over the crowd of well-dressed men and women— young and old, handsome and ugly, for the pair he sought, in vain.

Meanwhile Clara remained steadfastly beside him, nodding and smiling to acquaintances, and keeping her hand on his coat sleeve, with an air of gracious appropriation; the first dance struck up, he edged nearer, and nearer, to the entrance.

"You are waiting for the general, I can see," said Mrs. Skyler; "I wonder you don't go and stand at the door, and receive Miss Yaldwin bouquet in hand. By the way, what have you done with it?"

"I have left it in a safe place," he replied rather shortly. He wished he had been able to do the same with his companion.

"Well, the dance is half over, and you *see* she has not come. It's a sin to waste it, so do take half a turn with me."

This half-turn, comprised the remainder of the waltz, and as Mrs. Skyler was a first-rate partner,



a celebrated waltzer, in one respect no doubt, Roger gained, as Rose Yaldwin was quite an inexperienced performer. Precisely as Rose watched the clock, so did Captain Hope keep his eyes continually fixed on the door. He watched every cab that drove up disgorge its freight, but there was no sign of General Yaldwin and his granddaughter, and he was now a prey, to all the feverish miseries of suspense.

Clara kept him in close attendance, and bantered him spitefully on his anxiety, and absent-mindedness. He had danced three dances, with his cousin and taken her in to refreshments, and yet "She cometh not, he said" might have been the burden of his song, had he been disposed to sing — which was far from being the case. He found it impossible to shake off Clara, who was not in unreasonable demand, and who, nevertheless, was in the highest spirits. "What *luck*," she kept mentally ejaculating; "what a splendid and unexpected piece of luck! The old tiger has turned crusty—bless him!"

Watchful dowagers, and partnerless girls with ample leisure, noticed how constantly Captain Hope danced with his cousin, Mrs. Skyler, and wondered if there was anything in it? Five dances out of ten, was a liberal allowance for the widow to bestow on her cousin. There was no one to tell

these observing beholders, that Clara had asked for every one of them herself, and a short time afterwards when he had detached himself, she sought him out and whispered eagerly :

"Oh, Roger, my next partner, is *such* a horror ! do rescue me ; I'll throw him over, and dance with you instead."

"The Old Man of the Sea was not in it with Clara," he mentally remarked. "But he was engaged," he pleaded ; "and horror or no horror, never threw over his partners ; that was a woman's privilege," and Clara withdrew, with ill-concealed disgust.

By half-past twelve, Roger was in the lowest possible spirits, for he had given up all hope of seeing Rose Yaldwin again. He looked as grave as a judge, his aunt remarked, when he took her into supper. For her part, she was in buoyant spirits, brilliantly dressed in black and gold, with diamonds glittering in her hair and in her ears, and was enjoying herself extremely. She had met some old Indian friends, she had just been told a most amusing story, and she was hungry. It did not need a shrewd woman like her, to be told the reason of her nephew's gloomy expression.

"Where was the general to-night, I wonder?" she asked ; "I am surprised he is not here—he

is always a man of his word, and punctual to a minute."

"And I conclude to-night is the exception that proves the rule," filling his aunt's glass.

"I imagine the old lady is ill—something of that kind. She won't live long, I'm afraid. Well, Roger, I need not tell you that I am very sorry you are leaving us, and I think, you are a little sorry too."

"I never was so sorry for anything in my life," was the surprisingly complimentary reply.

"However, you will be back among us I hope before very long; your regiment has only another year or so in India. Perhaps by next Christmas we shall see you again." Raising her glass, she looked at him and said, "Your very good health," and there was a meaning glance in her eye, as she added, "Roger, I wish you—*success*."

"Thank you, Aunt Polly; I've had rather a run of bad luck lately—and to-night, the worst of all."

"Have you? I'm sure I never would have guessed it! You've been dancing away, too, the whole evening; but perhaps your idea is:

'Quand on n'a pas ce qu'on aime,  
Il faut aimer ce qu'on a.'

Eh, Roger?"

"No that's not my style," he protested. "By

the way," suddenly jumping up, "this is Annie's dance."

"Very well; never mind me, my dear. Old General Pomeroy will take care of me; and poor dear Annie does not have too many partners. We will go home as soon as it is over."

Annie was in her usual post, sitting among the wallflowers, when her cousin came up, and claimed her.

After a few turns he said:

"Shall we get away from the crowd, and go and sit out a bit?"

Annie would have preferred to finish the dance, being quite fresh and unfatigued, and fond of waltzing, but of course she acceded, and arm-in-arm, they sought a retired and dimly-lit little ante-room, which proved to be quite empty, and there seated themselves on a luxuriant sort of divan.

"I wonder why the general did not turn up to-night, and — Miss Yaldwin," began Roger at once.

"I cannot imagine. It will be an awful disappointment to poor Rose, she was so eager about coming. I saw her dress this afternoon—it was lovely—and everything laid out ready, even to her hairpins."

"I am awfully disappointed, too; ten times more than she can be. I am sure you have guessed how

it is with me, Annie ; and I can speak to you somehow, when I could not speak to Clara."

"No ; I don't fancy you would get much sympathy from Clara," said Annie, with a short laugh. "I know you like Rose."

"Like !" he echoed impatiently ; "I was going to ask her to be my wife to-night."

"Really, Roger !" exclaimed Annie, now sitting bolt upright, and gazing at him, with a startled expression.

"Yes ; I was certain I would see her, and I'm off now in two hours for India, and goodness knows when I shall come back."

"You can write," suggested the ever practical lady.

"Yes ; but I would fifty times rather speak," he said, suddenly standing up. "Writing is so unsatisfactory. You will have to help me, Annie—*will* you ?" he urged.

Annie rose to her feet also, and stood face to face with her companion, who was quite a different person to her cousin Roger of every day.

"I never have had any fair play, as you know yourself," he continued ; "something has set the general against me. It's been awfully hard lines, but you can't force yourself into a man's house. Will you go in and see her to-morrow, Annie, like a good girl, and give her the

bouquet with your very *own* hands, and a message from *me*?"

Annie hesitated, and picked nervously at her bouquet.

"Do, dear, dear Annie," he pleaded. "You know what bad luck it has been—how I've never had a single chance of speaking to her—and here I am going to India, without an opportunity of saying a word—one word that is everything to me!"

It was extremely pleasant, to plain, middle-aged Miss Baggot to find herself acting as a sort of proxy for a pretty girl; to have her handsome cousin Roger, looking straight into her eyes, with impassioned glances, and holding her hand tightly in his, whilst he pleaded with her eagerly in a broken and agitated voice. Yes, it was the nearest approach to a love scene, in which she had ever taken a part. The sensation was by no means displeasing!

As to passers-by, who gazed into the room, the dance being over—any one of them was ready to swear, that it was *not* to Mrs. Skyler, but his cousin Annie, that Captain Hope was devoted; they were undoubtedly engaged—yes, he had proposed for her that evening. As for his being in love with Rose Yaldwin, or ever having given her a thought, it was all the most absurd nonsense.

"You will take her a message from me, and a note?" he urged desperately.

"I don't know about the note," said Annie doubtfully; "you had better send it by post."

"At any rate, you will tell her, that I was bitterly disappointed; that, as far as I was concerned, it was the most wretched evening I ever spent. Tell her, that I shall be home before long. I'll exchange, and, Annie," catching her by her skinny arm, "ask her—you can put it in better words than I can—not to forget me quite. Tell her——"

"The fly is waiting," said a well-known treble. "Roger and Annie," continued Mrs. Skyler, sweeping in through the door, and speaking in a somewhat tart voice, "mother and I have been hunting for you everywhere. What *have* you been doing with yourselves?"

"We have been dancing," said Roger mendaciously. "But I see it is later than I thought, and time for me to be on the move."

\* \* \* \* \*

When Rose removed her finery, it was nearly two o'clock, so she would not go to bed. Had she not had, as the general remarked, her first sleep! She dressed herself in her morning gown, and turning out the gas, opened the shutters and a little bit of the window, and then, with a shawl wrapped

round her, took up her post, that bitter winter morning.

"At any rate," she said to herself, "she would have the poor satisfaction of seeing the very last of him." Collins, the ever punctual, drove up about half-past two. He rang next door, and then Rose heard steps and voices—*his* voice—and by the flash of a lantern, saw Captain Hope encased in a long ulster coat—saw him for the second as he turned and waved his hand, to some one at No. 15. Then the gate clanged, the iron door banged, and he was rolled away into the darkness. Rose sat meditating until the dawn began to break; after this, she threw herself on her bed and slept. When she awoke the room was bright with daylight, and Carter was standing beside her with a sympathetic smile on her face, tendering her a bouquet of the most lovely white flowers, tied with long white satin streamers.

"Miss Baggot sent it, ma'am," she explained, "with this note."

Rose at first imagined that she was still dreaming, then she sprang up, rubbed her eyes, and tore the note open. It said:

"DEAR ROSE,

"What became of you last night? We were *all* so disappointed not to see you at the ball,



especially Roger. He had provided bouquets for each of us, and I send in yours, by his desire. He started at half-past two o'clock. I have neuralgia in my face, or I would have taken your flowers in myself. Perhaps you can come in, and see *me*.

"Yours,

"A. B."

The bouquet was exquisite, and according to Carter's estimate must have cost pounds—it was like a bridal one!

"It was very kind of Miss Baggot. She must have got it to go with your dress, and paid a heap of money for it."

Rose made no reply, as she turned it carefully over, and examined the white orchids, tulips, hyacinths, and eucharis lilies. It afforded her some small consolation. She removed the lace and satin streamers, put them away among her few treasures, and placed the bouquet itself in a huge jar of water. When she went downstairs, she discovered that her grandmother was ill, and that the family doctor had been summoned; she was kept in close attendance in the sick room all day, and there was no going in to No. 15, but once or twice, she managed to fly upstairs just to look at her bouquet—all that was left of a delightful dream, of shattered hopes, was a bunch of dying, white, flowers!

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Towards evening, Mrs. Skyler, who had only recently risen, came in ostensibly to inquire for Mrs. Yaldwin, but in reality to cross-examine Rose, and give her a *coup de griffe*.

"So your grandfather went to sleep," she said in her pleasantest manner; "and I hear you could not wake him. Poor dear, I *am* so sorry for you, though probably after all you did not miss much."

"No. Did I not?" with ill-assumed nonchalance.

"You see,"—now removing her boa, and taking a comfortable chair before the fire and placing her feet on the fender stool—"girls who know *no* one get no partner. If you went out regularly it would be quite another affair, and if men knew that you danced well. As it is, they have their own set of friends, and an outside girl, is generally left sitting in a corner all night. It's a miserable experience, I am *told*, though, thank goodness, I know nothing of it myself."

"No; I suppose not," rejoined Rose dreamily. What matter how Mrs. Skyler patronized her now?

"It was a splendid ball. Roger said he did not know when he had enjoyed himself so much. He danced seven or eight times with me. He is a dreadful flirt, is he not?"

"I am sure I don't know," returned Rose gravely.

"Now, my dear little girl," continued Mrs. Skyler,

looking at her companion with her head rather on one side, "you know he flirted with you, to a most absurd extent, and I must say that I think it was a *great* shame. It is all very well, to make love to the Strattons and Gascoignes, hardened garrison hacks, but to make a fool of an unsophisticated child like you, was really too bad. Roger is a faithless wretch, and his love affairs are legion; but I am really very angry with him on *your* account."

Something seemed to clutch Rose by the throat, and for several seconds she could not articulate. Her face was burning, her hands were trembling, and her heart was beating very fast. To have the sympathy, and pity, of Mrs. Skyler was unbearable! No, she would not endure it. Why should this odious, scheming woman, this hypocrite, trample on her? At last she found her voice—a voice that vibrated with passion as she said:

"Captain Hope never flirted with me, or made a fool of me, as you so delicately express it. Be as angry as you please with him on your own account, but please, leave me, and my affairs alone."

"Rose Yaldwin, do you mean to be impertinent?" broke out Mrs. Skyler, and then she paused, for the general had just entered the room. Therefore, for the present, hostilities were bound to be postponed. As General Yaldwin accosted the little

widow, he mentally remarked : " By Jove, this cast in her eye is getting worse. It is a downright *squint* to-day."

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

MRS. GREY, OF JHANSI.

THERE was a piercing arrow in that innocent speech of Rose Yaldwin's: " Be as angry as you please with him on your own account."

No need to recommend this course to Mrs. Skyler. She was sufficiently furious with her evasive relative. All her pretty wiles, her smiles, tears, confidences, and flatteries, had been wasted, and nothing remained to her, but an humbling sense of failure—and an enormous dressmaker's bill. She had been fighting against fate, for all along, she had been haunted by a conviction that, although by clever stratagems (and lies) she had secured the actual bodily presence of her cousin, nevertheless his heart and his thoughts, had been entirely with that odious girl next door. Oh ! if ever circumstances afforded her a chance of making Rose Yaldwin uncomfortable, the will would not be lacking.

Annie sought an early opportunity of communicating Roger's message. She was naturally abrupt,

and the extraordinary nature of her errand, made her shy.

It was a simple task, to tell her friend that "Roger had been greatly disappointed at her absence—that he had not enjoyed himself one bit." All this came glibly enough, but matter-of-fact, practical Annie found immense difficulty in blurting out with a broad grin :

"He said he hoped, that you would not forget him."

With all the good-will in the world, Miss Baggot knew that the message had been ill-delivered, and that, on the whole, messages of that description, despatched through the medium of another woman, were a mistake.

She was afraid to say too much, for fear of committing Roger irretrievably ; consequently she erred in the opposite direction, and said too little. Roger's eager words, and impassioned expression, in the dimly-lit ante-room, were but poorly translated by Annie's hard-featured countenance and blunt speech at the prosaic hour of ten o'clock in the morning, and she left the impression on Rose's mind, that, for once in her life, Annie had attempted to perpetrate a joke—and that an ill-timed one !

\* \* \* \* \*

"Mother," said Miss Baggot, entering the

drawing room one afternoon in her walking things and speaking with unusual excitement, "I have something most extraordinary to tell you."

"It is not often that *you* tell me anything out of the common," returned Mrs. Baggot, laying down her book, "so let me hear what it is at once—meat is down a halfpenny, eh?"

"No," with an indignant gesture; "but Rose and I have just been into town together, and—what do you think? She has just been cut dead by people twice!"

"Cut dead!" repeated Mrs. Baggot.

"Yes; at Attwood's, the fishmonger. (By the way, salmon is *still* two shillings a pound.) She was just going up to speak to Susan Prior, when she turned her back on her in the rudest way. We could not make it out. And coming along the Mall we met Mrs. Gordon, who always stops and has a talk, as you know—and how hard it is to get away from her!—instead of which, she passed by with a nod to me, looking straight over Rose's head."

"You are sure you did not imagine all this?"

"Mother, how ridiculous you are! How often have you told me, that I had no more imagination than an oyster?"

"Yes, that is true. I wonder what it means? Perhaps Clara, can throw some light on the subject when she comes in."

"Most likely," returned her sister; and she muttered to herself as she left the room: "it would never surprise *me* if Clara was at the bottom of the whole thing."

Five o'clock found Mrs. Skyler at home, standing in front of the fire, slowly removing her gloves, and evidently in a state of uncommon good humour. It was not often that she returned to the bosom of her family in such a pleasant condition.

"Well," she said, "I've been having tea with Mrs. Grey in Warwick Road, and I'm just in time; it has begun to pour—we shall have a wet night."

"Yes," rejoined Mrs. Baggot indifferently, as she heard wild gusts of rain, lashing the window-panes. The weather was no concern of *hers*. She had her snug, lamp-lit room, and no need to leave her warm fireside.

"I've heard a nice story about Rose Yaldwin," continued Mrs. Skyler, as she made her gloves into a ball, and tossed them into an arm-chair. "We cannot have her coming to the house in future."

"Why not, pray?" asked her mother in her sharpest key.

"On account of Annie," returned Clara deliberately.

"On account of *Annie*! You must be raving."

"Wait till you hear," continued Mrs. Skyler with an air of haughty displeasure—"raving indeed!

Rose Yaldwin is a most dreadful girl. Mrs. Grey's maid is engaged to a policeman——" Here Mrs. Baggot broke into an irritating laugh. "And this policeman told her as a great secret, that last September he saw Miss Yaldwin walking on the parade between one and two o'clock in the morning, with a young man."

"How did he know it was Miss Yaldwin?" inquired Mrs. Baggot feebly. Of course it had all come out. She had predicted it to Roger, but for once the fulfilment of her own prophecy, caused her intense discomfiture.

"By the dog, Jacky—he was with her. Boag, that's the policeman, could not be positive as to the identity of the man—he was a gentleman, and young—but he could swear to the lady; and *now* what do you say?" concluded Clara triumphantly; warming one be-ringed hand at the fire, and stretching the other open-palmed to her mother, as if demanding some immediate contribution.

"I say that I know all about it," was the astounding answer. "Yes," sitting up very erect; "I have been in the secret all along—a perfectly harmless secret. The man was Roger."

"Roger?" repeated Mrs. Skyler, recoiling a pace.

"You know the general's temper, and the life



he leads his household," proceeded Mrs. Baggot, now dropping into a tone of easy narrative. "Well, last September, he and Rose, had a fearful falling out, and she was on the eve of running away—nay, in the act of running away—one night, when Roger met her on the Mall by chance, and talked, and reasoned, and coaxed, and got her to go back—I saw them come in myself—and Roger came straight up here and told me all about it." This was not a strictly correct version of the story, as we know.

"I don't think that your amended edition, makes it so much better," said Clara, with her most superior air. "She was out between midnight and one or two o'clock; she was walking with a young man. You must allow me, to have my own ideas; *I* am not easily hoodwinked."

"Then am I to understand, that you don't believe your cousin Roger, or Rose, or me?" demanded Mrs. Baggot excitedly.

"The question is," coolly evading the other query, "what complexion the general will put upon the tale, when it comes to his ears? I don't mind betting you five pounds that he will turn Rose out of his house."

"I don't bet on serious matters," rejoined Mrs. Baggot stiffly. "If he turns her out of his house, I shall receive her into mine."

"In which case, *I* shall take my departure," retorted Mrs. Skyler with an air of lofty virtue.

"Very well, Clara, you may," was the totally unexpected reply; "and once you go, you shall not return."

Was this her mother, who was daring to speak to her in this way? thought Clara, as she opened her long eyes in angry amazement. Her mother, whom she bullied, flattered, deceived and cajoled? This pale, resolute, old, lady, seemed a complete stranger.

"How many people have heard the story?" she demanded; "since *when* has it been going round the town?"

"Only since last night, and I don't think more than a dozen people know."

"And give a lie half-an-hour's start, and who can catch it? It may be in London, by this time. However, if the worst happens, Rose shall have a home here, and of course Roger—who was *always* in love with her—will come home at once and marry her."

This was not the scheme of punishment, which Clara had mentally meted out to her rival; she was absolutely playing into her hands, at the present moment; and she stood watching her mother, who was in a completely unprecedented frame of mind, go hastily out of the room. No, no,

it would not suit her, to leave her luxurious quarters, even if Rose Yaldwin was adopted into her family.

She had a comfortable home, free board and lodging, under her mother's roof; her mother was liberal enough, she paid for her washing, stamps, entertainments, and allowed her to order flies at her own discretion. These little items were not valued at the moment, but supposing she had to provide for all these things herself? her four hundred a year would not go far. No, no, she would not move off, and give her share of a warm nest, to that detestable girl, who seemed to bewitch all her relations. Meanwhile she heard hasty footsteps overhead in her mother's room, callings, bangings of doors, and some one quickly descending the stairs; she went into the hall, and was confronted by her mother in her oldest bonnet and a waterproof. Mrs. Baggot was certainly very cross. She hated getting wet, as if she were a cat. She never went abroad a foot in bad weather, or weather unsuited to French boots, and silk stockings, and here she was about to sally forth, in the teeth of a dark February evening, and amid torrents of rain.

"Where are you going?" inquired Clara tragically.

"Out," was the stern laconic reply.

"But where, this awful night?"

"I am going to your friend, Mrs. Grey. I must stop this story at once; there is not a moment to lose."

"And you've never called on Mrs. Grey, and it's pouring cats and dogs; there's not a fly to be had, and it's three-quarters of a mile to Warwick Road," cried Clara, launching objection, after objection.

"Yes; all the same I'm going," seizing an umbrella and opening the door.

"You could not do more, if it was one of us," remonstrated Clara.

"If it was *you* I would not do as much. I shall probably get my death; you are old, and well able to look after yourself, but Rose is a mere child, with few friends, and I promised Roger."

And so saying, she jerked up her dress, and began to descend the steps, with daintily shod feet, and then tripped down the wet walk with the cautious gait of one who was painfully conscious of thin stockings, and Louis Quatorze heels.

"So you promised Roger, did you?" repeated Clara, standing in the open doorway, and gazing mechanically after her departing parent. "I wish I had known all this before—it would have saved me an immense outlay of time, worry, and money."

\* \* \* \* \*

With the rain beating in her face, and the wind trying to wrest the umbrella from her, Mrs. Baggot struggled bravely on, regardless of muddy roads, puddles and the weather, for her mind was intensely preoccupied with respect to her approaching interview.

"It's going to be a duel *à la mort*," she said, "and one or other of us will practically fall."

As she came to this fierce conclusion, she stopped before a small brilliantly lit-up house in a terrace.

There was a light in the hall, in the room next the hall, in all the windows upstairs, and as she entered, a sound of loud laughing was audible. She removed her cloak, gave her name distinctly to the servant, and followed her quickly up to the drawing-room. As the maid threw open the door and announced, "Mrs. Baggot," there was an instantaneous silence.

Mrs. Baggot had never called before, and now she arrived alone at half-past six, and on a pouring wet evening—but she never did things like other people.

It was a pretty little room, with snug chairs, Persian rugs, shaded lamps, and photographs; indeed, at first, it seemed all lamp shades, and photographs.

Mrs. Grey, was a pretty little woman (really

little), with prominent blue eyes, brilliant white teeth, and light brown hair. She said she was twenty-nine—but her dear bosom friends generally added another decade. She had come to reside in Morpington two years previously, and gradually insinuated herself into society. She dressed well, gave pleasant luncheons, and charming afternoon teas—especially on Sundays. She numbered more men than women, among her acquaintances, but had a certain number of ardent intimates of her own sex—which number included Mrs. Skyler. Mr. Grey, an undefined individual, was somewhere abroad; there was an immense photograph of him on an easel, and to this his wife gaily introduced her visitors, saying, "it was the next best thing to presenting them to the original." To the question, "When will he be home? when do you expect him?" her answers were copious, but vague. Mrs. Grey, though she made great fun of Mrs. Baggot, was secretly annoyed, that that eccentric lady had never deigned to call upon her (nor had the Yaldwins), and she was, with all her vagaries, one of the upper ten, and in the most exclusive set in Morpington. Here she was at last, though looking decidedly forbidding, and sternly rejecting all offers of tea. She did not attempt to join in the general talk. No, after she had given her opinion of the weather, she simply sat in silence,

and then it suddenly dawned upon her hostess, that she had come with a purpose, and was determined to sit the others out.

After a short time, these gay guests—a very young man with an eye-glass, and a loud laugh, and two middle-aged ladies with smart bonnets, and “revived” hair—took their departure; and as soon as the door had closed upon them, Mrs. Baggot at once found her voice.

“Mrs. Grey,” she began, “you are no doubt surprised to see *me* here on such a day, and at such an hour. Nothing but a most urgent matter would have brought me out. I have come to speak to you privately, about Miss Yaldwin.”

“Yes?” assented the other with an impertinent elevation of her arched eyebrows. She now saw her way to paying out Mrs. Baby Baggot for being stuck-up, and not having called upon her, and she drawled in her company voice:

“But, perhaps, the less we say of that girl the *better*?”

“I quite agree with you—as soon as this story is silenced,” rejoined her visitor with emphasis.

“Silenced?” echoed Mrs. Grey, with an interrogative smile, that was absolutely maddening.

“I suppose Clara has given me the true account?” proceeded Mrs. Baggot, and she recapitulated it word for word.

"Yes, that is the true unvarnished tale."

"And when did you hear it?"

"Only last night."

"Do many know?"

"Only about a dozen. I just dropped a hint to the Priors, and Gordons, and Smithes—people with *daughters*."

"I understand. Well," now suddenly rising to her feet, "I come to tell you, that I know all about it. Rose was running away from home, and my nephew happily met her, and brought her back. Rose is a good girl——"

"I'm afraid you will find it difficult, to get other people to agree with you," responded Mrs. Grey with a significant smirk.

"They will agree with me, if *you* will help me, Mrs. Grey, and put an end to the scandal at once."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Baggot!" in a tone of mock-humility, "you value my powers absurdly. I could no more stop it now, than turn the Thames. If I had known her personally, or even known *you*"—with an insolent look—"I might have taken some interest in the matter; but you can scarcely expect me to endeavour to work a miracle, for a hot-headed and, to say the least of it, sly and imprudent young person, who is a total stranger."

"Do you know—have you any idea of what may



be the result of your discovery?" demanded Mrs. Baggot with a catch in her breath.

"Well," with a little shrug, "I should not wonder, if her grandfather, who, from all I can hear, is an outrageous old bear, were to bundle her out of the house—out of Morpington."

"And you won't raise a finger to prevent it?"

"My dear lady, why should I, even if I could?"

"I will tell you why — you can, and shall," said Mrs. Baggot, who was extremely pale, and whose voice had a ring of repressed passion. "Unless this story is stopped at once," and she shook her gloved finger impressively, "*you* will have to leave Morpington. I give you"—and she glanced at the clock—"just twenty-four hours."

"Now, really, Mrs. Baggot," protested her hostess, with a patronizing laugh, "I always heard that you were eccentric—but I never supposed——"

"You never supposed, that I knew, that you were the notorious Mrs. Grey of Jhansi?" interrupted her visitor.

Mrs. Grey's face became ashy grey; her great bold eyes looked into Mrs. Baggot's with an expression of horror.

"What do you mean?" she stammered in a faint voice.

"Just precisely what I say, and *you* would herd an innocent girl out of society. Oh, what a place

this world is, to be sure! I have always known who you were, from the very day you arrived, and up to the present I have never told a soul. I did not call on you, as you can easily understand, but I held my tongue, for I thought you probably wanted to make a fresh start in life, and as far as I was concerned, you should have your chance. And to think of your being the first to cast a stone!" and she glanced upwards, as if she was astonished to behold the ceiling in its place.

"You are talking the most insane nonsense. How dare you identify me with — with that creature?" cried Mrs. Grey hoarsely.

"I am, as you know, speaking the simple truth. I saw you, when you first went out to India fifteen years ago. You were pointed out to me at Allahabad. You were a very pretty woman *then*, and I have a good memory for faces. Grey is a common name, but yours is an uncommon countenance, and I can prove what I say, a hundred times over."

"I defy you to prove anything against me, you libellous old scandal-monger," screamed Mrs. Grey hysterically. "Give me one proof."

Mrs. Baggot glanced at the door—it was half open—and then she bent forward, and whispered into her hostess's ear.

Mrs. Grey drew back, and gasped. Her face became suddenly livid. She looked fifty years of

age. Then she broke down completely, and began to sob, hard dry sobs, as she leant her forehead, against the mantelpiece and groaned out :

"And it has followed me here."

"Yes, it has ; and you confess that you are ' that creature,' as you call yourself?"

"And what can I do—for—Miss Yaldwin?"

"Whatever you please. You are now acting solely in your *own* interests ; but if by to-morrow, this scandal about her is not ground down, and stamped out to the very last spark, by the next morning the other story—your story—will be known from end, to end, of Morpington. I have only to whisper it, to Chatty Stratton and to old Mrs. Skinder, and it will go far and wide. Remember, that I implored your forbearance in the first instance—and in vain. You had no more mercy than a crocodile. I only fell back on your own past, as a last resource. It is the sole weapon with which I can defend Rose Yaldwin—and I shall use my power remorselessly."

"What am I to do? What do you suggest?" inquired her listener sullenly.

"I am sure you need not apply to *me*. I have always understood, that you are marvellously fertile in resources. You might ask your friends to tea, or write, or call. As long as you assure them that there is not a breath against Miss Yaldwin, the

means of the communication, are immaterial ; and if the fact is not known, marked, and inwardly digested, by to-morrow night, you will be the sufferer, and under any circumstances I shall tell Clara. She can keep a secret, and I think it right that she should know who you are."

"You are a hard woman, Mrs. Baggot."

"By no means. On the contrary, I am generally considered deplorably *soft*. And I have not been hard to you. Have I not guarded your story most religiously? Do you think any of your dear bosom friends, would have done as much?"

"You are right. You have been generous to me, and I—yes, from first to last, I have behaved like a beast! Yes, I will do my best to carry out your wishes; in fact, I will carry them out without fail," she added, with sudden resolution, "and I will speak to Price, and the policeman."

"As to the policeman, you may send him to me, if you please. I will tell him the whole truth, and I am sure he will believe me and hold his tongue; and the sooner you have a word with your maid the better. Good night," said Mrs. Baggot, not attempting to shake hands. "I rely upon your promise. Remember, if you break it, that I shall keep mine."

The old lady then hurried briskly downstairs, and took her waterproof, and her departure.

"Well, mother?" said Clara, opening the door and eagerly relieving her of her wet umbrella. "What ages you have been! What have you arranged with Mrs. Grey? You did not get much satisfaction from her, I am certain. Did you?"

"I got all that I required," replied Mrs. Baggot, as she divested herself of her dripping cloak in the hall. "That story will be crushed out by her to-morrow. By to-morrow night, it will be as if it had never been uttered."

"How on earth did you manage it?" gasped Clara.

"By the magic of a name. Clara, will you promise to keep what I say to yourself?"

"Yes, of course."

"On your word of honour?"

"On my word of honour. And what was the magic name?" she inquired eagerly.

"You have heard of Mrs. Grey, of Jhansi?"

"I should rather think I *had*," with emphatic scorn. "But why?"

"Because Mrs. Grey, late of Jhansi, is the lady you had tea with this evening."

"What!" almost shrieked Mrs. Skyler, staggering against the hat-stand. "The woman who was forbidden Government House—the woman who—"

"Hus-s-s-sh," interrupted her mother. "As Annie would say, *Remember the servants!* How-

ever, thank Goodness, I have settled the other affair, and it certainly seems rather astonishing, that the woman who was going to turn an orphan girl out of her home—the woman whose sense of propriety has been so shockingly outraged—should prove to be none other, than that too notorious person. You think, that I know queer people, my dear, and pick up some undesirable acquaintances ; but you see, after all, I am more exclusive than you imagined. *I never made a friend, of Mrs. Grey, of Jhansi."*

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## VARIOUS SPECULATIONS.

Quoth Hudibras "I smell a rat."

—G. BUTLER.

THE immediate result of Mrs. Baggot's embassy, was a violent cold in the head. Rose came in to inquire for the invalid two days after her expedition, and found her, nursing herself over the fire, in somewhat low spirits, and armed with a carbolic smoke ball.

"So I hear you went out in all the wet, the night before last," said Rose, who conversed with Mrs. Baggot in terms of easy affection. "I don't wonder you are laid up."

"Pray, how do you know I was out?" sniffed Mrs. Baggot peevishly.

"Leach saw you coming in," was the ready reply.

"Leach sees too much," and she indulged in a prodigious sneeze.

"But, dear Mrs. Baggot, what *could* have possessed you, to venture out in such weather! Why did you not send Annie, or even Wickes?"

"It was a matter of business, my love. I was obliged to see to it myself, as it was rather important. Now sit down, and tell me all your news."

"I have not much, as usual," seating herself.

"Grandpapa went up to town, by the early train, to see some rare Cashmere stamps, and to attend a meeting of his special stamp 'ring.' I have had quite a pressing invitation to go to tea at the Priors' to-morrow afternoon. The other morning, in town, Mrs. Prior turned her back upon me, and now she writes and signs herself 'yours ever affectionately'; and the same day Mrs. Prior cut me, Mrs. Gordon passed me by, with a queer sort of half bow between Annie and me. Yet, to-day, she came all the way across the road, to speak to me, and kept me for ten minutes. Now I wonder what it all means? What do you think, Mrs. Baggot?"

Mrs. Baggot coughed, and merely shook her head. Silence was golden in the present instance. And Rose little dreamt, that there was any connection between Mrs. Baggot's cold, and Mrs. Prior's pressing invitation.

Miss Yaldwin was not the only person who was lost in astonishment at this particular period.

Many of her own sex, marvelled deeply, at the sudden coolness between Mrs. Grey, and Mrs. Skyler.

They had been so intimate, and now Mrs. Grey's doors were never darkened by her friend's graceful shadow. They bowed when they met, but that was all, and unkind cynics laughed, and made disagreeable remarks about "women's friendships." Mrs. Grey was certainly not as conspicuously *en*



*evidence* as formerly. She had retired into her shell ; she had joined the local clothing club, and mothers' meetings—and all the world wondered.

Annie Baggot also found food for speculation at this time. Accustomed as she was, to her unmanageable and youthful parent's, wild follies and misdemeanours, she wondered much, oh, *very* much, to find one day, on opening the boudoir door, that parent closeted with a policeman ! Boag had been summoned, and had duly appeared, reeking of new cloth, and blacklead. At first, he fully expected to be set upon the track of some sly domestic thief. Not at all. Mrs. Baggot wished to speak to him privately, respecting a very serious family matter, and she spoke for ten minutes, to some purpose. She told him a true unvarnished tale, concluding her narrative, with these words :

" You see, Boag, what trust I am putting in your honour. Now, at this moment, you know a good deal more of General Yaldwin's affairs, than he does himself. You know him, and you can guess what the result will be, if this unfortunate escapade ever comes to his ears. I am relying confidently on your assistance, to hush the matter up ; it was no crime."

" No, ma'am, it was but natural ; and if I may say so, I'm only surprised the young lady did not break out years ago. He is a terrible old gent. No one could blame any one, for making a bolt of

it from him, he has eyes all over his head, and takes everything on himself. What do you think he says to me one day? 'I say, constable, your boots arn't properly laced.' Now, what was that to him?' demanded Boag, with just indignation.

Boag knew Mrs. Baggot well. She was undoubtedly one of the most charitable ladies in the town; his own relations, had several reasons to bless her kind offices, and he was aware of the many secret errands of mercy, on which her prim elderly maid was despatched. He respected Mrs. Baggot sincerely, and was deeply honoured by her confidence. She had spoken to him just as if he was a gentleman—and he intended to live up to the part!

Yes, Wickes, the prim maid, to whom Clara strongly objected, because she was slow, because she did not wear smart dresses, and because her hands were cold, was greatly indebted to her mistress. She adored her, and revered her, from the top hair of her chestnut *toupée*, to the heel of her small bronze shoe. She could (if she had dared) unfold a tale of her munificent charities—a tale, that would have afforded a ready answer, to Mrs. Skyler's unsolved problem:

"I wonder what my mother has done with all her money? She does not spend half her income. I wonder how much she will *leave*?"

## CHAPTER XXV.

## MANDALAY.

"On the road to Mandalay,  
Where the old flotilla lay."

—R. KIPLING

MEANWHILE, Roger Hope had arrived in the East, had joined his regiment, as it marched down country, and embarked with his company at Calcutta, *en route* for Upper Burmah. At Rangoon, the city of the golden pagoda, the troops re-shipped, on board a flat river-boat, the *Tavoy*, and proceeded up the Irrawaddy to the town of Mandalay. The town of Mandalay was now British territory, and one aspect of the war was over. The King and his amiable consort were in exile, there were no battles to wage, or fortresses to storm, but there was an evasive and deadly enemy in the shape of dacoits, hidden away among the tangle of bamboo forests, that had yet to be extirpated. The Irrawaddy, was not new to Roger Hope, nor were the size and appetites of the maddening mosquitoes, nor the frequent pagodas, luxuriant elephant grass, or forests of palm, that bordered that headlong river; that important stream, that represents a main artery between

Europe and China ; an impetuous torrent, into which, if a man falls, his chances of escape are small ; its cruel under-current will clutch him in its deadly grasp, and refuse to release him till it has carried him for twenty, ay, for two hundred miles ; a greedy river, that, after the melting of the snows, cuts out fresh courses year by year, voraciously eating away the sandy banks, that tumble into its capacious swallow, and are no more seen.

In the full tide of the Irrawaddy, the curiously built native boats, with their carved sterns decorated with a row of soda-water bottles, and their broad brown sails, move swiftly down, outstripping, with a fair wind, the steamers of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, bearing the produce of the upper districts to the markets of the south ; great flocks of wild geese and duck sweep across the river and settle upon some distant hidden lagoon, far away from the track of man ; and graceful cranes, elevated on their long legs above the crops, snow-white paddy birds, and egrets, are conspicuous points in the landscape.

The Irrawaddy steamer *Tavoy* paddled into her berth at the south shore, just as the last sounds of the dress for parade bugles, of the 100th Madras Infantry were dying away, and the hum of the bazaar was rising louder, and louder, as the sun

rose higher and higher. Down the gangway planks, filed a thousand men of the East Wessex, forming up with precision, on the baggage-strewn wharf.

The palace of the ex-king was their destination, the centre of which was known to all loyal Burmans as "the centre of the universe," and was surmounted by a ball of glittering silver and crystal, which stood out in bold relief, against the dark background of the distant hills.

Away they marched up the long straight road, through clouds of blinding dust, thick and choking, till the landscape was blurred and yellow, and only the feathery tops of the palms, were visible to the weary troops.

Mrs. Baggot, with all her sharp sight, would have been puzzled to recognize her nephew in his Karki suit, with brown leather accoutrements, or to distinguish him from the thousand travel-stained soldiers who were treading the soil of a new country for the first time, a soil that would offer them—how many graves? Across the moat, through the ponderous gateway, in the thick walls beneath which, lay the bodies of many a victim of barbarous sacrifice—victims to dark and mysterious intrigues, whose tragic fate, was rarely known beyond the precincts of the palace.

Now and then, a thrilling whisper of murderous

deeds, would stir the gaily-dressed, merry frequenters of the great bazaar. Chattering girls, with flowers in their sleek hair, and cheroots in their mouths, would shake their heads and mutter to one another in serious under-tones, but in a day or two, the rumour would die away, forgotten in the ceaseless round of business, and pleasure.

The palace, the royal residence, stands inside the fort, and consists of several grand pavilions, gorgeous with carving, gilding, and red paint. One of these contains the king's throne, over which, towers a spire of immense height, its pinnacles glittering with mirrors, a landmark for many miles. The elaborate carved and gilded roofs, and interiors remained, but gone was the barbaric court, the *pooays*, music, massacres, and dancing; the tittering ladies in waiting, the trembling victims, and the splendid gaudy furniture, all had given place, to a different race, and a different *régime*. Red tape, reigned in the king's summer-houses, a telegraph Baboo occupied the centre of the universe, the rude, but useful charpoy, took the place of expensive western upholstery. And nought remained, as a memorial of tragic scenes of bloodshed, but the impress of a woman's hand on the lintel of the door of the queen's audience hall, where murdered by the ruthless Soupialah, she had clutched with her gory fingers the slippery pillar of gilded teak.

The head-quarters of the Wessex, were established at the Golden Pagoda, a magnificent specimen of fantastic woodwork, peculiar to Burmah. In the compound, were dwarf palms, and waving plantains, and from the steps, one obtained a splendid view of purple mountains, the sacred hill of Mandalay with its thousand pagodas, its tinkling bells and countless Bhuddist shrines. It seemed to Roger Hope, almost a desecration to occupy such a place, to loll in long chairs in the holy of holies, and to behold one's domestics cooking at the foot of the sacred steps, whilst the smoke from their hookas blackened the calm face of Bhudda !

However, such are the exigencies of war, and habit soon became second nature. After a time the splendours began to pall, and familiarity had its way.

For the capital of a recently annexed country Mandalay proved a surprisingly civilized station ; in interludes of transport, and convoy duty, of dacoit chasing, and dacoit catching — two totally different things — there was polo, racing, cricket, paper-chasing and concerts ; the ladies were conspicuous by their absence, but the garrison bore up manfully, and amused themselves with astonishing success. There were evening entertainments, in an old kyoung in the mounted infantry lines, which were much appreciated ; the bands of various

regiments played selections, and those who were gifted, sang to their fellow-creatures such songs as: "Rolling from the Canteen," "Be Kind to your Dog," "Here upon guard am I," and "Close the Shutters, Willie's dead." These were frantically encored; the last especially was even more popular than "Finnigan's Wake." It is a curious fact, that nothing appeals to the taste of Tommy Atkins like a long and truly melancholy ditty—the longer and the more lachrymose it is, the more it is enjoyed.

In response to a sporting challenge, a team arrived from Myingyan to do battle in Mandalay, and to make a week of it; the week to include contests in racing, shooting, polo, billiards and tennis; there were royal dinners, and friendly greetings, and exciting lotteries. No outsider would suppose at the first glance, that the garrison and their guests were in the heart of a strange and lawless country, and liable to be decimated by fever, cholera, and dacoits.

Roger Hope took things quietly, he had been in Burmah before; these pagodas, with their merry worshippers, this luxuriant vegetation, these rushing rivers and impetuous hill ponies, were all familiar to him. He was not in his old spirits, for some mysterious reason no longer the life and soul of the mess (quite the contrary): however, at the



present moment, his mantle appeared to have fallen on a certain Mr. Toby Winn, who had accompanied the competing team from Myngyan—more in the character of guest and backer, than a champion for the lists. The first time Roger encountered him, he was merely aware of the top of a head, covered with somewhat wild light brown hair, and two long legs, visible from the back view of the Bombay chair in which Mr. Winn sprawled! the chair was surrounded by half-a-dozen delighted listeners, and the head was in course of being refreshed by a cigarette, and a pint of iced champagne.

"Who is the fellow?" inquired Roger, who had been on duty all the morning, and was hot, thirsty and dusty, and not in a festive frame of mind.

"Winn, Toby Winn. Have you never heard of him?" rejoined a brother officer. "He is the best fun out—an awfully clever chap. I must ask him to dine with me to-night," and he hurried away to secure his prize.

"Winn," supplemented a grizzled field officer, sinking into a low cane chair near Roger, "is undoubtedly clever—much too clever for *our* young fellows."

"What do you mean, sir?" inquired the other, as he removed his helmet and wiped his hot fore-

head; he had been having an exciting morning, with a batch of untrained pack bullocks.

"He won four hundred rupees from that young ass Jones, at poker, the night before last, and unless I'm mistaken, he has plucked little Peter Poole to his last feather. Peter's two ponies are in the market."

"And who is he when he is at home?"

"There it is; he has no home. At one time he says he hopes to get into the Bombay and Burmah Trading Company: at another, he is trying for the police. Meanwhile, he is the scourge of small detachments, a gentleman loafer, with lots of brains, a good address and any amount of cheek."

"Evidently," returned Roger dryly. "I saw him looking at the brand of the champagne just now, and asking if it was all right?"

"He comes and sponges on young fellows at isolated posts. Knowing the proverbial hospitality of soldiers, he lives upon them, drinks their liquor, rides their ponies, borrows their rupees, and then gets passed on like the queen in old maid. No one who knows him for what he is, cares to keep him long."

"But who *is* he?" reiterated Hope impatiently.

"He is a gentleman by birth, and has been to a public school, and all that; how he has drifted up here I cannot tell you, but on the whole, he

makes a good thing out of it. I don't believe his name is Winn, no more than it is mine; but, not being in the service, we can't look him up. Now he has come here, he will exploit Mandalay till it is too hot to hold him."

"He must be a regular young scoundrel," muttered Hope.

"He has his followers, his worshippers, I can tell you. He is such an amusing beggar, tells a good story, draws a good caricature, does marvellous tricks on cards, is as active as a cat, and will ride any animal that has four legs. I've known fellows that he has let in, declare that his company was worth *double* the money, and he is such a plausible chap, they say you believe every word he says when he is talking to you."

The subject of these remarks, having finished some amusing narrative, and sent his audience into roars of laughter, now suddenly rose, stretched himself in a leisurely fashion, and faced about. He wore white flannel trousers, and a gaudy striped blazer (possibly borrowed); he was tall, fair, and broad-shouldered; there was not a hair upon his smooth shrewd face; his eyes set close together, were twinkling, keen, and small, and he had General Yaldwin's nose!

Yes; he was not a Standish, but unmistakably a Yaldwin. Here was Hubert, the squandering, idle

ne'er - do - well, and despite the extent of Burmah, Roger had come across Rose's brother after all.

"I say, Hope, will you have a game of rackets this afternoon?" inquired a wiry-looking major.

Hope's eyes were still fixed on the so-called Toby Winn, and Toby, as he heard the name, started perceptibly, met his gaze point-blank, surveyed him with a long glance of cool scrutiny, and then turned, and dipped his casual hand, into an open cigar-box.

It was evident to Roger, that the young impostor recognized him.

That same evening, Toby, the popular darling, dined at mess, and Captain Hope, who was on duty, subsequently noticed him playing whist, and deeply immersed in the game. He stood and looked on for some time. Toby was a real born gambler, backing his luck heavily, and betting on the cards. He was pale with excitement, and as he tossed back his hair, with an impatient motion, the scar on his forehead, was the seal of his identity.

"How could he afford these sums?" thought his indignant spectator. "He had no settled income, no occupation. Even by lamp-light, his dress clothes looked seedy, and his linen frayed and worn. Yet he carried on gallantly, with many a rupee note, and many a joke, and many an answering

laugh. No, no; he was not in the least like Rose," concluded Hope after a steady inspection; "he was merely a young, rowdy, and ridiculous, caricature of his grandfather, the general." At one o'clock Roger retired to his quarters, leaving the prodigal delighting his audience with music-hall songs, and imbibing strong drinks, at their expense.

On the table, in his own apartment and in full light of his kerosine lamp, lay an official. Hope tore it open. It was, as he had expected, an order to start in command of a party for service up the Chindwin within twenty-four hours. On the whole he was glad. He was weary of gilded Mandalay, its palace, and lily-sprinkled moat; he preferred some rougher quarters, and a more exciting life. This extraordinary combination of East and West, of rations and small books, of idols and polo, of pay sergeants and yellow-clad priests, confused his imagination, and he preferred the simple and primitive jungle, where a puppet pooay, and a Badminton party, were not likely to clash on the same afternoon!

Before starting, he had a word with Toby Winn, who sauntered up to him with a cheroot in his mouth, as he stood on the palace steps, and accosted him thus:

"I say," removing his cheroot, "isn't your name

Hope? And haven't you relations, in that beastly hole, Morpingham?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, I've often heard of you, and I expect you've heard of *me*, but mum is the word. How was Rose when you saw her?"

"Very well."

"And the old boy? As hard as a nail—no sign of breaking up, eh?"

"No, not the smallest," with stern unsympathetic, emphasis.

"And so you are off to Yin Mu at daybreak."

"Yes, but before I go, tell me—can I do anything for you?"

"No, no—thanks awfully. I'm in clover here, and I'm just knocking about and seeing life, and all that sort of thing. By-and-by, when my grandparents are gathered to the family vault, I shall be a rich man. Don't be surprised, if some day I look you up. I daresay I shall get sick of Mandalay sooner or later—or it will get sick of *me*," he added with a laugh, and nodding an airy good-bye, he strutted off, with his hands in his pockets.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## "TO GET YOU TO BURY ME."

"And the curse of Reuben holds us, till an alien turf enfolds us,  
And we die, and none can tell them where we died."

—*Gentlemen Rankers*.—R. KIPLING.

THE detachment commanded by Captain Hope consisted of a subaltern (Mr. Jones), five non-commissioned officers, fifty rank and file, a native apothecary, and the usual train of camp followers and baggage ponies. They were bound for a small isolated post, about sixty miles north of Mandalay, in the centre of a district notorious for dacoits. They crossed the Chindwin in unwieldy country boats, and pursued their march without adventure, forcing their way, through narrow forest paths and thick undergrowth of heavy jungle, surprising and searching suspected villages, and halting at night by some tumble-down zayat, or rest house, or beneath the shadow of a venerable pagoda.

On the fourth day they reached their destination, a kyoung (or priest's house), which they fortified at once by a strong bamboo stockade. It stood on low swampy ground, not far from the whirling, swirling Chindwin, and its position had been chosen more for strategical purposes than salubrity. It was close to a dense belt of forest, within view

of the blue Shan hills, and a stone's-throw of a friendly village. After the rains, the villagers could tell how the deadly mists would rise from the rice-fields, the poisonous miasma from the marshes, and the cruel white fog, from the river. In a very short time, the troops were settled in their new quarters, and Roger and his comrade, had made their home in the old kyoung, with its teak walls and carven roof—The humane creed of the Burman prevents him taking life, however *small*, and the previous occupants were undoubtedly Buddhists of the strictest sect. Escorting convoys and hunting dacoits, was the chief duty of the little force, waiting and watching for opportunities that never seemed to come, traversing miles of jungle in pursuit of phantom foes. It was exceedingly difficult to follow up dacoits, owing to their accurate knowledge of the jungle paths, and astonishing capabilities for getting over an immense tract of country in an incredibly short space of time. From their fastnesses in the Yaw mountains, they swooped down on villages, whilst on the Chindwin itself, the country boats, laden with rice and tamarinds, fell an easy prey to armed Burmese, who, from behind some sandy spit, or lofty screen of reeds, darted out in their canoes in the shape of pitiless pirates. Stretching towards the hills, were dense forests of palm, endless scrub thickets of prickly pear and



cactus, interspersed with paddy fields, and tracts of arid soil. Sometimes the searchers came upon the still smoking ashes of a camp fire, and now and then upon that most hideous spectacle, the victim of a crucifixion. Roger Hope, strolling alone, far from camp, one evening, with his thoughts in another hemisphere, became suddenly aware of a heavy noisome odour, which loaded the air already heavy with decaying vegetation. There was a slowly rising dark mass, a sound of flapping wings. The branches overhead were covered with vultures—vultures in hundreds, tearing, rending and fighting around—what? A strange object that made a ghastly outline against the sky—a crucifixion. On a frame of bamboo, and bound with cords, was the body of a man, a horrible object. By the dim light, Hope saw that the victim had been slashed with a knife, and on the breast, firmly driven in by a stake, was a piece of paper, on which was scrawled in Burmese: "This is how we treat those who serve foreigners." The unfortunate wretch, whose remains shook and swung, above, was evidently a letter-carrier, some miserable villager who, for a rupee or two, had run the risk of capture and death. At the foot of the scaffold, lay an empty post-office bag, slit open and rifled. No wonder that letters were rare, if this was the fate of her Majesty's mails.

Shway Yan was said to be in the neighbourhood. He was the scourge of all peaceful inhabitants, wherever he showed himself, for, despite a handsome price upon his round, bullet-head, he had still a large following of Thebaw's disbanded army. Wherever he went, his course was marked by massacres, crucifixions, and burning villages. And now a determined effort was about to be made to capture him, and half of the small detachment at Yin Mu was drawn off, to swell this force. Roger felt lonely when his comrade marched gaily away, in command of the party, promising to return with the Boh's head on a charger. The evenings seemed desperately long now, as he sat in his dark, solitary, kyoung, endeavouring to read an old paper, or to write letters (that were likely to be lost in the post), by the light of his hurricane lantern.

It was all very peaceful; the village was still as death; there was nothing to be heard, but the challenge of the sentry, and the tap, tap, of the native watchman, as he beat the hours of the night on his hollow drum. Underneath were the picket telling stories, and smoking the while; and in the rear, the Indian servants enjoyed their hukas, and discoursed of their pay, their savings, and their far-off homes; it was the calm before the storm.

One night, there was a sudden wild alarm; a

scout arrived breathless with the news that Shway Yan and his followers, were but a short distance behind. Shway Yan, who had been sought so long, hearing of the reduced garrison, and of a (fabulous) chest of money, was coming to slaughter the strangers, to carry off their arms, ponies, and treasures, and to sell their servants as slaves to the wild Chins.

As if by magic, there was an end to smoke and song ; rifles were loaded, ammunition got handy ; the stockade was strengthened by sacks of rice and flour ; the ponies were driven under shelter ; this was all the work of a very few minutes. The little garrison waited in grim expectation, and they had not long to wait. Soon there were sounds of the quick rush of many hurrying footsteps ; and a crack of musketry, horns, conches, bells, jingals, burst upon them like a tempest ; and above all the wild yell of the armed Burman on the war-path. The stockade was closely surrounded, but the Wessex were desired to reserve their fire, until seemingly hundreds of broad swarthy faces, swarmed above the paling, and then they gave them a well-directed volley, which threw the foe into confusion. The faces that fell, with screams, were replaced by others as fierce — faces with dahs between their strong white teeth. And from every aperture in the stockade, came a fusillade.

Luckily the muskets were ancient and rusty, the shooting erratic, whilst the invested force fired steadily, and with deadly precision. Hope's revolver was almost red-hot, from constant discharge, and he and his band—though as ten to one—were holding their own well. How it might end, it would be hard to say; the light was bad, the dacoits were in multitudes, fought savagely, and kept themselves now securely under cover. They threw lighted rags, and branches, into the enclosure to set fire to the sacks; they were endeavouring to force the weakest side of the stockade. The shrieks, yells, and curses, stifling smoke, and slashing dahs, were at the climax. A straw might turn the tide one way or the other. Tommy Atkins, wounded, and fierce, and blackened with powder and blood, fought sternly on. He was prepared to sell his life dearly—when the tide suddenly turned his way. A huge Burman, flushed with anticipated victory, with a gorgeous silk handkerchief bound round his head, scrambled on to the roof of the kyoung—a foolhardy action, and his last. As he stood for a second against the sky, he offered a magnificent mark. Roger Hope raised his revolver, took steady aim, and shot him through the brain. With one piercing yell, he fell, rolled heavily down the roof, and pitched headlong among his enemies, a corpse; yes, stone dead.

This event was succeeded by a sudden cessation of hostilities. The firing ceased ; there was evident consternation among the attacking party ; and then it dawned upon the troops, that the dacoits had lost their leader ; this stalwart Burman, with the rich silver dah, the double-barrelled pistols, and splendid silk putsoe, who was lying motionless at their feet, was none other than the notorious Shway Yan ! Yes, it must be, and they set up a ringing cheer. Ere the cheer had died away, the enemy had melted into the forest, carrying off their wounded, and leaving their dead upon the field. Seventeen corpses lay outside the stockade, mostly killed by a small dark puncture, where the conical bullet had found its billet.

The defenders' casualties were comparatively small ; two men badly wounded, some ugly dah cuts, one camp follower, and two ponies killed.

The next morning, the dead Burmans were buried at some distance by the villagers, and there was great bell-ringing, jubilation, dancing and feasting over the capture of the Boh. The reward of five hundred rupees, set upon his head, was subsequently divided among the gallant defenders, of what was now known, as "the sixth, or Hope's stockade," and after the storm there ensued, once more, a great calm.

Life was terribly monotonous ; the dacoit chasing

was practically at an end, and sport, in the neighbourhood was poor ; a few peacock, a tree partridge or a barking deer, or more often an empty bag, was the result of a long day's tramp. As for society, there was none beyond the friendlies in the village ; the smiling, smoking, gambling Burmese—to whom life is (if possible) all play and no work—would gladly have entertained the white officer, and feasted him with a meal of succulent ants, the odoriferous napie, or other edibles, of a doubtful or indigestible description ; or entertained him, with dancing and discordant songs, but none of these delights appealed to Hope ! And now the climate began to live up to its reputation. The low, creeping, white, mists rose stealthily over the land, and sickness seized on almost all the detachment ; it was the worst type of deadly malarial fever, that saturated the district, and proved a far more dangerous enemy, than an armed force, and the apothecary was one of the first to succumb. So short-handed were they, that Captain Hope himself occasionally took his turn as sentry. He gazed enviously on the distant Shan hills, well aloof from the swamps, and pestilential agues, of this overheated and unhealthy country ; how he wished that his poor, fever-stricken men, were in that cool region ! One evening, as he stood outside the stockade, watching a blood-red sunset, he was aware of an object crawling towards him, a

very old man, in ragged European clothes, almost bent in two; on nearer approach, he recognized that it was not, as he supposed, an aged person, but Hubert Yaldwin, bowed down by fever, disease, and want.

"Ah!" he murmured, in a weak, husky voice, "I told you I'd look you up some day. I've come"—making an effort to straighten himself, and surveying Roger with dim eyes—"to get you to bury me."

"What nonsense!" expostulated the other. "You are not as bad as all that yet. Come in, come in, and we will see what we can do for you," and taking him by his skeleton arm, he gently led him into the kyoung, and placed him on a chair.

"You can do nothing for me, but let me die in peace," was his reply, and, indeed, when Roger looked at him closely, he read death in large letters, written on his drawn, emaciated, countenance.

He was literally skin and bone; his feet were bare and bleeding, his clothes in rags; altogether he was in a pitiable condition. His host lost no time in procuring beef tea, and a little brandy (a precious medical store). Hubert gulped it down with avidity, then a piece of tough chuppaty; it was painful to watch him, his hunger was wolfish. Bathed and dressed in Hope's clothes, he lay back

in the chair with pillows behind him, and with a long sigh of contentment, announced that he "felt better."

"I am always at home, in another fellow's garments," he remarked, with a faint laugh. "I've worn out several outfits, that were never got for *me*. Yes, I'm better, but you need not be afraid, I'm not going to get well ; and a good job, for every one."

"Not for your sister, at any rate," protested Hope.

"She has always been a fool about me," he murmured.

"How did you make your way here?"

"Oh, I can talk Burmese, and I got a cast in an empty rice boat, and then I fell in with a convoy party, after that I lost my way ; I've been six days in the jungle, living on prickly pear fruit, sleeping on the ground—and seeing horrors. I got into a scrape at Mandalay, and I had to make a bolt of it ; I knew I was at the end of my tether, and I felt very seedy and so I came to you, for it will be a comfort to Rose to know that I died on your hands. I've been a bad boy, as you may guess ; if I had had lots of money and gone into the service, I daresay I'd have been a rattling good fellow ; but as it was, I never got a fair start. What's fifty pounds ? that's all the old gentleman gave me, and



minus his blessing. As it is, I've lived on my wits for five years, and now I've come to the end of them, and"—dropping his voice—"of everything."

"Oh, I say; come, you must not talk like this; I'm a fairly good nurse, I will patch you up yet, and get you down the river to Rangoon—and, maybe, home."

"Not you! You'll never get me farther, than a little mound under a dwarf palm, outside the stockade. Bury me with my face towards England, will you?"

"I wish to goodness, you would not talk like this, said his listener impatiently. "Why should you give up the ghost in this way?"

"Oh, yes, I must talk, and make the most of my time. You speak of patching me up, you don't look very fit yourself; your eyes are like two holes burnt in a blanket; you have got the fever. I know this place by name, it is a pestilential hole at this season. When Thebaw wanted to get rid of a minister quietly, and without the fuss and ceremony of a public execution, he just sent him *here* on some fool's errand, and in a month he was safe to be dead--and I'm safe to be dead, long before that—safe to be dead—safe to be dead," he repeated drowsily, and turning his head from the light he fell into a fitful slumber, murmuring, "Safe to be dead."

In spite of the most assiduous care, yea, though the milk of the only cow was annexed, though every remaining fowl in the village was slaughtered, and boiled into broth, Hubert's hold on life relaxed day by day. He became extremely restless, and had his charpoy (or rather Roger's), daily carried out into the verandah, as he hated the dark interior of the kyoung, and there he lay, tossing from dawn till sunset, sometimes sleeping, but more frequently looking out upon his surroundings, with weary, regretful, eyes.

"I like to be in the daylight," he whispered ; "in the warm sunlight as long as I can, for I'll soon be in darkness—darkness. You'll tell Rose ; she will be sorry. My real name and all about me are written on a scrap of paper in my tobacco pouch ; it's the only thing I possess, and do you keep it. I wrote my name, and where I came from, long ago, in case I went out suddenly—and they never heard at home."

All one noon, he lay in a half-unconscious state, holding Roger's hand in his ; at sundown he started up with a final flicker of life, looked wildly around him, and shouted to the sentry, in a loud, clear voice :

"Quite right to present arms ; but you should always reverse arms, when you see a corpse going past you," and fell back dead.

He had barely breathed his last, when the merry tanned countenance, of Lieutenant Jones, and a reinforcement of thirty men of the Wessex regiment, presented themselves at the stockade, to the great joy of their comrades. Lieutenant Jones' jovial expression faded suddenly, when he saw the dead body of Winn with the sheet drawn over his wasted form, and it seemed to him that his friend Hope was in a fair way to follow the gentleman loafer. He was in high fever, and quite light-headed. What did matter-of-fact Hope, whom no one ever suspected of an ounce of sentiment, mean, by assuring him, Tommy Jones, "that he knew, he liked lily of the valley, and that of course it ought to be a white bouquet."

What did he mean, by declaring that "he *must* have found it, and that Annie promised to give it to him with her own hands;" and what was all this nonsense about a "blue Natal stamp, and a forgery?"

For days, the flame of the fearful jungle fever, seemed to lick up Hope's life; his skin was scorching, his temperature and pulse, at the highest ratio compatible with existence. The only remedy, (and that a desperate one) was to put him in a dhooly, and carry him away to the Shan hills, braving all the dangers of the intervening and pestilential terai, the belt of swamp and forest, that

lay at the foot of the mountains. He was fortunate enough to survive the ordeal, and was borne up the steep paths, that led to the breezy hill regions and into the cool pure atmosphere, meeting over and over again caravans of Pathan traders, with their sturdy bullocks and pack ponies, the latter gorgeously bedecked with beads, and spangled looking-glass. Armed escorts accompanied these motley trains, and at their head, proudly rode the chief, in his Dolly Varden hat, loose blue trousers, fur-lined cloak and silver-mounted dah. Higher and higher yet, till the winds from the Chinese border rustled through the hangings of the dhooly and thrilled the sick man's veins. What a contrast after the stifling, sickening heat of the plains, now becoming blurred and indistinct, through the thickening forest! Soothed by the murmur of the mountain streams and rushing cataracts, lulled by the music of birds, the invalid passed gradually into the high lands, beyond which lay the Northern Shan states. The party pushed on through groves of oak and flowering shrubs, and beneath luxuriant groups of orchids, which swung heavily in the scented breeze, dreamily listening to the tinkling of caravan bells, as they passed down into the valley far below. Thus through little known, but exquisite regions, Roger Hope ere long found himself, reposing under the pines of a hill sanatorium.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## CLARA'S GOOD NEWS.

THE winter at Morpington was unusually severe, and, as the spring advanced, blighting east winds carried off a number of victims. Mrs. Yaldwin failed rapidly, and early in May she died, and had a great funeral. Another member of the family died not long afterwards, and had no grand obsequies—merely a hole dug under a dwarf palm by a couple of soldiers, and a service read over him by a round-faced subaltern. Such, we have already learnt, was the end of Hubert Yaldwin, the family “ne’er-do-well.” Had he lived, and survived his grandmother, he would have been Hubert the well-to-do, for Mrs. Yaldwin’s fortune had been strictly settled on her son and his children, and Rose was now the heiress of a comfortable sum, that brought her in five hundred a year. Poor Rose was in great woe. She missed the constant occupation her grandmother’s illness had entailed, and she was heart-broken about Hubert. There had been nothing to soften the blow—no preparation, no farewell letter, no relics—merely a few curt lines from some officer to her grandfather, informing him of the fact, and

also that Mr. H. Yaldwin owed him (Lieutenant Jones) four hundred rupees (bill enclosed), and that as he was hard up, he would be obliged if the general would settle it at his earliest convenience. Two months later, a letter arrived from Roger Hope. It was also addressed to the general, and was written in a very shaky hand, giving full details of Hubert's illness, and mentioning that the writer himself, was still a sufferer from the same description of fever, that had carried off so many lives in Upper Burmah.

Mrs. Randall arrived at No. 13 not long after her mother's death—a stern-faced, bustling matron, with an eagle eye, and hooked nose. She swooped down on all Mrs. Yaldwin's lace, furs, and jewellery, severely cross-examined Rose as to domestic expenditure, and the condition of her father's health and departed, with a large amount of spoil, leaving her niece with the reins in her hands—mistress of the house. Rose was now twenty ; she had money of her own (and trustees) and considerable influence with the general. He was grateful for her unwearied attendance on the old lady, and allowed her far more liberty than of old. He bought her a piano, took her up to London for ten days, and, in the course of the autumn, consented to her paying a visit to her mother's people. Rose was absent for three delightful months, and whilst with her aunt and cousins,

she learnt to ride, to play tennis, to talk like other girls—and to look happy.

Meanwhile, the general was left alone—dangerously alone. Of course, he had his club, his vestry meetings, and his stamps ; but, although he would not confess it even to himself, he was lonely, and he often dropped in next door and stayed for an hour. These visits were graciously returned by Mrs. Skyler ; at first on pretence of consulting him on some small matter, or to give him a little help in housekeeping, but latterly without any excuse at all, and the general gradually developed the habit of calling daily to take her for a walk.

Of late, Mrs. Skyler's creditors had been unpleasantly pressing. Her attention was repeatedly directed to the amount of her account, and a cheque in course of post requested. There had been a lamentable falling off, in invitations to visit her friends. Her mother seemed more partial to Annie than formerly, and invariably took her side in family debates. She was not liberal in opening her purse strings, and giving her sweet, coaxing, flattering, daughter, a nice cheque, and Clara feared that there was truth in the whisper, that eccentric Mrs. Baggot secretly spent a large portion of her income on charity—odd charities, the objects of which were ferreted out by herself and Wickes. Struggling families, desolate widows, and even the lower

animals, miserable old horses and stray dogs, felt the benefit of her money ; but then she could not, as she said to herself, burn the candle at both ends —assist her poor neighbours, and pay Clara's debts. In Clara's opinion, her mother's charity should begin and end at home, and her first duty was to her own flesh and blood. During the summer, to the amazement of her friends, Mrs. Skyler suddenly exhibited a passion for foreign stamps, and actually began to make a collection, in a volume of expressive dimensions ! The general, proved an ardent instructor, presented her with duplicates, and gave her every encouragement and assistance. She invariably took every new addition, in to the well-known study, to be examined, classified, and valued, and could soon discuss stamps as seriously and as coherently as the veteran himself.

As she pored over a rare specimen, microscope in hand (never had any one treated his collection so sympathetically), little did the general guess her thoughts, or that, as she was scrutinizing a rare American local, with the microscope to her eye, she was saying :

" I shall take precious good care there is none of this nonsense afterwards " (*afterwards !* What did she mean ?) ; and that as she reverently turned over the pages of his best portfolio, she was secretly appraising its contents, and wondering how much



they would fetch? and where was the best market for this folly!

Leach viewed the comings and goings of "the squint-eyed widow," as he irreverently termed her, with strong disfavour, and he delivered his mind somewhat in this fashion, to another army pensioner:

"If he does not look out, she will eat him up—body, bones, and feathers—just as that brute of a white cat of hers, ate the cook's canary! It's a pity Miss Rose is from home, not that *she* is able to stand against her; she can't shut a door, or open it, as she likes," he added darkly. "The widow's the devil, and if she comes here, Jeremiah Leach takes his discharge."

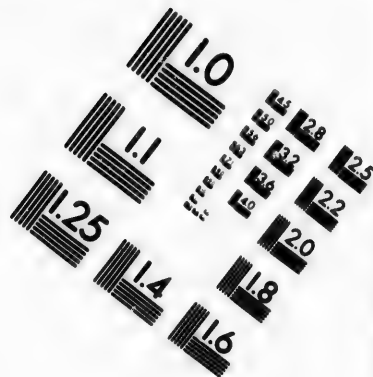
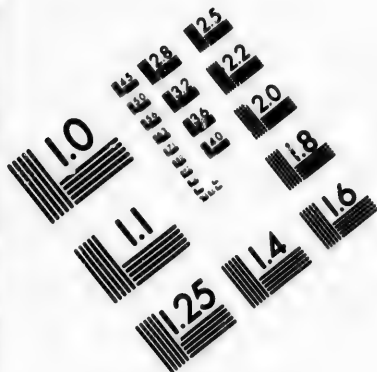
Of course, the people in Morpington, could discuss their neighbours as freely as the inhabitants of other towns, and it was generally agreed, that "either of the widows at No. 15 would marry the general if he asked her." Such a preposterous idea never dawned upon that gentleman for months—not until Mrs. Skyler herself insidiously introduced it to him, and left it to make itself at home in his mind.

He had always admired her. She was smart-looking, appreciative, and pretty; she talked to him constantly of India, and of old times, and led him on to fight his battles over again, as they paced

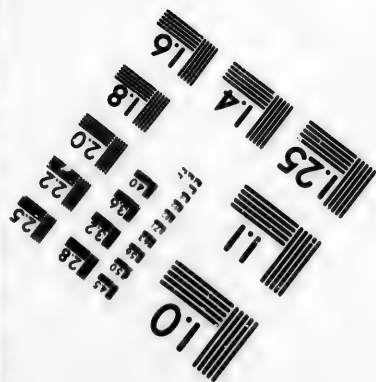
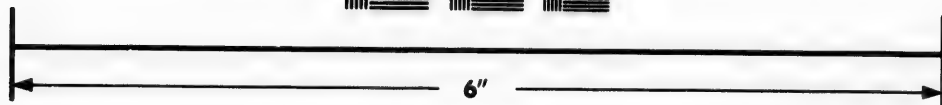
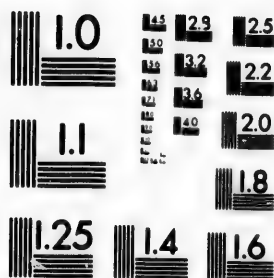
through country lanes, or up and down the Mall ; and as they conversed, his bosom swelled, and his step became as elastic as it had been twenty years ago. Mrs. Skyler could talk as well as listen, and made her companion the recipient of the tale of her woes, and the somewhat complicated sorrows of her heart. Her mother was a dear, and she adored her, but she was really too unconventional at times, and she feared that she would be obliged to look out for a little place of her own. Annie was so frightfully prim, and old-maidish, she actually covered up her cock canary, when he was taking his bath ! and she was so depressingly matter-of-fact, and punctual, and fussy. Of course, only to the general, would she confide all this—but somehow she felt that she could open her mind more freely to *him*, than to any one else in the whole world.

The guileless warrior, was deeply flattered and impressed, and then the fair lady further proceeded to confide to him, how lonely she felt, how solitary her heart was, how she craved for sympathy and love, how wretched her first marriage had been—a match of her mother's making—she and her husband had been totally unsuited to one another, and she had been miserable—of course the dear general would never breathe this—her husband had been a hard, selfish, man, wrapped up in himself and his work ; he had never understood her, or known her





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real character, not to the day of his death! And since then, she had never listened to another suitor, though persecuted with attentions: Roger, for instance, had been *too* ridiculous.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Rose returned home, she was much surprised to see an extraordinary change in her grandfather; he had become much more juvenile in manner and appearance, he was particular about the fit of his gloves and his coats, he had reduced the crape on his hat by one half, and he called Mrs. Skyler by her Christian name! The drawing-room furniture had been counter-marched, and covered with pretty cretonne; a dreadful white marble chiffonier, resembling an obituary monument—to which Mrs. Yaldwin had never dared to object—was gone, and in its place, there was a fashionable standard lamp, and a bamboo screen.

"Who has done all this?" thought Rose, as she gazed around. Aloud she exclaimed, "How nice it looks!"

"Yes; Clara came in one day—she thinks it is such affectation my not calling her Clara—and said we should move with the times, and I placed myself entirely in her hands, and she arranged it just as you see."

Rose saw other things also; she saw that Mrs. Skyler was a daily visitor on some pretext about

her stamp collection. She generally joined them in their walks, and remained to tea. Rose found herself powerless to keep the enemy at bay, or the fascinating widow from within her gates. Mrs. Skyler was a clever woman, and equally well equipped for holding or storming a fortress; push and cajolery, were now her most effective missiles. The general was provokingly long in surrendering, but the prize was worth some trouble. In justice to herself, Clara had made inquiries. General Yaldwin, C.B., had over three thousand a year; also he was an erect and well-preserved man, a distinguished officer; there was nothing objectionable about him but his temper, and that—would be kept in proper check. Whilst Rose was at home the investing force made little progress; she dutifully walked with her grandfather, talked to him and read to him for hours; she eagerly devoured all Indian army news, and especially noted intelligence under the head of "Upper Burmah," but any items she gleaned she kept to herself; it would never do, to appear to know more about a certain person, than his own people.

"Roger is a wretched scribe," said Annie; "he has only written once, but you have seen the splendid silver bowls he sent mother?"

"And you would rather have them than letters?"

"Well, yes; since you put it in that way, I

would," replied practical Annie. "They are quite the making of our dinner table."

Late the following spring, Rose paid another visit to her relations the Standishes, and the post of companion, to the Companion of the Bath, was once more assumed by Mrs. Skyler. They took long walks into the country—"to hear the birds sing," averred the lady—and as they rested one day under a hawthorn tree, Mrs. Skyler suddenly brought her heavy field guns into action.

"Alas! dear friend," she said, laying her pretty hand lightly on his, "I am afraid that this, must be our last walk!"

"Why, what do you mean?" he asked.

"I am really ashamed to tell you"—modestly averting her face—"people have been so unkind, so wicked, talking about us; it is too—too cruel."

"Let them talk," he blustered in his most ferocious manner; "a pack of gossiping old cats."

(No, no, dear old gentleman; you are not going to escape thus.)

"But I cannot afford to let them talk," urged Clara, affecting an agitated voice, and breathing in short sniffs. "I am a young woman, and I have always been most circumspect. I *did* think that this delightful friendship might have been allowed me; but no, I must resign a companionship"—sniff—"which has been an oasis in my life"—sniff.



"Dear general, we must see very little of one another in future," and she began to cry.

In the spring, an old man's fancy sometimes turns to thoughts of love. When General Yaldwin, and Mrs. Skyler, rose from that bench, they were solemnly pledged to be man and wife.

As they strolled slowly homewards, arm in arm, she said ; "And what about Rose ? I suppose she will remain in Eastshire ? A girl with money, can always find a home."

"Yes, and Rose is a good, honourable girl, brave and staunch. She would have made a fine officer ; the spirit of a lion—no cant, no twaddle—but, between you and me, she has a temper."

"Takes after some one I know," pressing his arm affectionately, "and I must say I like it."

The general stared (as well he might) but he believed every word his enchanting companion uttered ; he was a proud, and happy man, as they walked homewards, discussing plans as eagerly as if they were in their teens. Clara put forward her ideas so promptly, and so clearly, that an ill-natured listener might have suggested, that these were well-matured, carefully-considered schemes (which they were). Her companion agreed to all her suggestions, and was as proud, and radiant, as a boy of twenty. He did not notice Leach's interrogative gaze, nor take to himself, the mynars

shrill cry of "*Idiot!*" the instant he set foot in the hall.

"Mother," said Mrs. Skyler as she entered the boudoir, and stood in the middle of the room, slowly removing her boa, "I have a piece of good news for you."

"Have you, my dear?" rejoined Mrs. Baggot suavely.

"Yes, you lucky woman, you are about to get me off your hands, for a second time. I am going to marry General Yaldwin."

"Nonsense, Clara, you are not in earnest."

"Never was more so. He proposed to me this afternoon, and I said yes," and she smiled demurely.

"But he is more than thirty years your senior. Let me see, you are——"

"Never mind my age, mother," she interrupted impatiently. "I am quite prepared to be an old man's darling; he is tremendously fond of me, quite infatuated, poor dear, and he told me that he had seventy thousand pounds in the funds—a thousand for every year of his life—besides house property. Of course some of this goes to his odious daughter, and some to Rose; but he can make capital settlements. Annie," to her sister, who had just joined them, looking blue with cold, and somewhat cross, "I have found a use for General Yaldwin after all. I am going to marry him!"

"Are you?" An expressive pause, and then she said with unexpected heartiness, "Well, I am very glad to hear it."

"It will be nice to have you next door, Clara," observed Mrs. Baggot, "and, indeed, latterly you have been as much there as at home."

"Oh, I don't know about next door! Morpington is such a stagnant hole; society is so ancient; I would like to move, and get among a less antediluvian set."

"And pray what will you do with the general, my dear?"

"Oh, I shall smarten him up; he does not look more than sixty at a distance; I shall take great care of him, and diet him, and coddle him, and do my best to lengthen out his days."

"I am certain you will, my love," rejoined her mother, "for no doubt you are aware, that a thousand a year dies with him."

"And when is it to be?" asked Annie with unusual eagerness.

"Oh, very soon, *he* says, but I say not for two months. There is my *trousseau*——"

"Yes," assented her sister, and then added, with a glance of daring significance, "And *now*, you will be able to pay Cérise."

\* \* \* \* \*

Next morning Clara's suitor arrived, bouquet in

hand; he enjoyed a long *tête-à-tête* with his intended, and a conference with Mrs. Baggot, and remained to lunch. Every day, he now brought a bouquet, and stayed to lunch. He loaded his prize with presents, he purchased her a superb ring, and three diamond stars, and a flight of brilliant swallows, and openly regretted, that he had allowed Jane to carry off her mother's furs and jewels! He was persuaded, by a knowing acquaintance, to invest in a Stanhope phaeton and pair of steppers, in which turn-out, he daily drove his bride-elect in triumph. What a contrast she afforded to poor old Mrs. Yaldwin, with her ear-trumpet, and her bath-chair! and he himself was changed. Would his former wife have recognized him, in these white waistcoats, and with flowers in his button-hole? The general felt as if he was a young man, and had taken a new lease of life, as he bowled up and down the Mall, with his divinity beside him.

But every one was not as well pleased as the happy pair. Some said, "The old lady is barely dead a year"; others, that "it was the general who had caught a Tartar *this time*"; others, that "there was no fool like an old one."

What a mercy it is that we cannot hear what people say of us behind our backs.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## FELLOW-TRAVELLERS.

"Soldier, soldier, come from the wars,  
Why don't you march with my true love?  
We're fresh from off the ship, an' 'e's maybe give the slip,  
An' you'd best go look for a new love."

—R. KIPLING.

THE malarial fever clings with deadly tenacity to its victims. It may appear to have been shaken off, but it returns only too faithfully, and, after eighteen months' foreign service, Roger Hope was invalided home. It was August when he arrived, and London was almost as hot as Allahabad, with a glaring blue sky, burning pavements, and dusty trees. As he stood looking into a print shop in Piccadilly, a face among the pictures vividly recalled Rose Yaldwin. Whilst he gazed he made a sudden resolution. He would run down to Morpington the next day, and see how the land lay? There was nothing like being on the spot, though he had gained little, the last time he was there.

The morning express started at a very early hour, and Roger, having despatched a wire to his aunt, travelled by a later and slower train, which was laden with whole families *en route* to the sea-side, or the hay-fields. In his carriage, there was an

elderly lady with a poodle (smuggled), who, at each station, put her head out of the window, and eagerly enquired for her maid.

"Horrid old snob," thought Roger, as she trampled on his feet for the fourth time. "If this goes on, I shall pretend I have a valet, and stamp on *her* toes."

At one station, he noticed a landau and handsome pair of bays, who were tossing their heads above the white palings, and on the platform a rather interesting group, possibly the owners of the turn-out—a tall, majestic matron, two pretty girls, and a young man in knickerbockers. They had evidently come to speed a young lady in half-mourning, who was standing with her back to him, and presumably coming into his carriage, for the door was flung open by a porter, who received from the hands of the footman, a remarkably neat dressing bag, a plaid, and a parasol. They were placed in the rack, above the opposite seat, and Roger surveyed them approvingly. He liked to see women travelling with parcels trim and few. He almost fancied that he could tell a woman's character from her luggage! What a contrast was here, to some of his recent fellow-passengers *via* Brindisi. An Indian mem-sahib, with her boxes, tiffin basket, roll of bedding, parrots, ayah, infant and feeding-bottles. One unhappy man, had assured him that

his wife and daughter, had nine-and-forty boxes and parcels between them. But it was manifestly unfair to compare the baggage of these ladies, who came from a far country, to that of a girl who was probably going a few stations down the line. Meanwhile, the leave-takings were in progress; the girls hugged the traveller, and said:

"Now, be sure you write to-morrow, and tell us if you have any adventures—and come back soon."

The young man permitted his blue eyes to say unutterable things, and held her hand, for an unnecessary length of time. She turned at last, in answer to an imperative "Take your seats, please," and got in. Yes, it was as he had half expected—it was Rose Yaldwin. In one glance, he recognised her, though she was now leaning forward, and nodding out of the window, as the train slowly left the platform. A different Rose. Even his unaccustomed eyes, noted the elegance of her travelling dress, the perfect fit of her dainty glove. As she drew back at last, with a happy little sigh, her eyes met his.

"You have not forgotten me, I trust, Miss Yaldwin?" he said.

Miss Yaldwin surveyed him gravely, and her face became a shade paler as she replied:

"No, Captain Hope. I have not quite such a

short memory, but—I never expected to see you. I thought you were in India, or rather Burmah."

"Yes," he said to himself bitterly, "fellows who once go to India, are always supposed to stay there. It's a convenient limbo, for inconvenient people," but aloud:

"No. I am home again, you see, like a bad penny."

"I've been away from Morpington for some time, and not heard any news. Annie never writes. I believe it is a family failing," she added, and she looked at him frankly with a pleasant smile.

"Well, I'm no great correspondent, I must confess.

"Only that it is rather soon, I would suppose that you were coming down to the wedding."

"A wedding!" he repeated. "I have not heard of any. Who is going to be married?" and he glanced at her keenly.

"I am sure you will never guess."

"Who is it then? Any one I know?"

"Grandpapa," she rejoined demurely.

"Do you mean your grandfather?" he asked, thoroughly astonished.

"Yes; and he is going to marry your cousin."

"Not Annie!" in a sharp key of protestation.

"No. Mrs. Skyler is to be my new grand-mamma."



"Well"—after a long pause—I suppose life wouldn't be worth living, without its surprises."

"You may be amazed, but Morpington is not. In fact, the wise people there have seen it coming for a long time, and I really think they will suit one another rather well."

"Indeed," returned Captain Hope dryly, "I should not have supposed it. Then I gather that the alliance between No. 13 and No. 15, has your sanction."

"My sanction was not asked, but it is accorded. Clara—I am not to call her grandmamma—has wonderful influence with grandpapa. Of course, he is much older than she is, but he is marvellously active for his age, and the engagement has taken years off his life."

"I can understand him right enough—but her?"

"Oh,"—nodding her head—"she will have a home of her own; she will be very well off. She likes grandpapa, and she will get her own way."

"You amaze me more and more. I must honestly allow that this is the last thing I expected to hear, and you—are you to make a third person in the *ménage*?"

"No. Of course I must look out for another home. That was my aunt, Mrs. Standish, who saw me off: my aunt and cousins, they wish me to live with them. But I would rather have a little

place of my own close by, with a pretty garden and a pony-cart and half-a-dozen fox-terriers."

"No other society but the fox-terriers?" he asked with quiet mockery.

"I do not see why I may not live by myself? I am past twenty-one, and my aunt says, I must have a companion, if I won't live with her—a nice, pleasant middle-aged lady."

"And no doubt it will be quite a temporary arrangement," remarked Captain Hope significantly; he was furiously jealous of the blue-eyed cousin, who had bidden her a lingering adieu.

This shy wild Rose, that had blushed unseen, was now an exquisite garden flower, and a young woman who had a fortune in her pocket, as well as in her face, and with all the *aplomb* and self-possession of a beauty and an heiress. This was not the same Rose, who had been snubbed and silenced, who had worn shabby clothes, and poured out her heart to him that September night, as they tramped up and down the Mall in company; he wondered if she remembered. On the spur of the moment, he spoke.

"Remember! Shall I ever forget it?" she responded with deepening colour. "What a wild, undisciplined creature I was in those days. Only for you, I should be starving now in some garret in Paris."

"Your grandfather, would never have forgiven you?"

"Never; and it is time for me to inquire for Jacky, my companion in that escapade."

"Jacky is well. I could not get a passage for him at the last moment, when I was going out, and so I left him with my people. He is devoted to my mother, and I don't suppose he will be at all pleased to come back to me; he is a fat, elderly gentleman by all accounts. And now, Miss Yaldwin, it is time for *me* to ask you a question. How was it, that you broke your promise, and never came to that ball?"

"Oh! surely Annie told you? But possibly you have forgotten," she said softly.

"I would be impossible for me to forget, what I have never heard. For months, after I went out, my letters were lost. My regiment was on the march down country, and no doubt some of my correspondence is still lying under layers of dust, in little way-side post offices. Other letters, were scattered to the winds, by Burmese dacoits, only circulars and bills seem to bear a charmed life. Why did you not turn up that night? What was the reason?"

"I fully intended to go, but grandpapa fell asleep after dinner, and I dared not awake him, and there I sat in my ball dress waiting, and watching, until the clock struck twelve."

"Whilst I was waiting, and watching, at the ball-room door. You don't mean seriously, that you were *afraid* to wake him?" he asked bluntly.

"It is perfectly true," she answered calmly. "Do you remember the story of Wallenstein, how one of his chamberlains awoke him without orders, and was consequently hanged? Grandpapa, was always my Wallenstein."

"I feel perfectly confident, that Clara will have none of your scruples about rousing him," said Hope with emphasis. "And were you disappointed?"

"Of course I was. Did you not know, that it was my first ball?" her old stock answer.

As she uttered this reply, she never changed colour, she looked him frankly in the face and smiled. She had forgotten—and why not? And this debonair, blue-eyed cousin, was everything now. There was a silence for some moments, during which time the old lady with the poodle surveyed them with glances of acrimonious disapproval. *What* were girls coming to, chattering away in this style to complete strangers? She was greatly scandalized. This young woman had never stopped talking to the man opposite to her, since she got into the carriage; and he looked like an officer too. It would never surprise, her, if they both began to smoke. Ah! they were beginning to get confidential, to whisper.

"I saw your letter to grandpapa," said Rose in a lower voice. "I am glad,"—and she checked back two tears—"that *you* were with him."

"Yes," he returned in the same low key, "I am glad too. I could not do much, but I could not have done more, if he had been my brother."

"You will tell me everything about him, another time," she murmured.

"Yes, another time." For they were at a station, and their companion once more had arisen, and pulled up the window, calling shrilly to every porter: "Look here, my good man, will you send me my maid?"

"I have never thanked you for the lovely bouquet you sent me," said Rose in an audible voice, when the train was once more in motion. "I sent you my thanks through Annie."

"Oh?" he replied rather stiffly, "I am glad you liked it."

"It was exquisite. I kept it in water for ages."

Captain Hope looked at her curiously, and said:

"My offering was extremely honoured."

Why did he speak in such an odd, sarcastic, way? She was puzzled to understand this change in his manner.

"You should see the bouquets that grandpapa carries in to Clara, every day," she continued.

"Does he, indeed? And I suppose they are not

composed of evergreens, and the sere and yellow leaf? What have the pair in common? I have been racking my brains, to try and discover what can have drawn them together?"

"I can relieve your brains at once," said Rose with a merry smile; "they were drawn together, by a mutual taste for foreign stamps."

Hope stared for a second in blank incredulity, and then gave way to a shout of laughter.

So Clara had taken a leaf out of *his* book—sly Clara. And now the train slackened and slackened, and finally shot into Morpingham station.

"There is grandpapa," cried Rose, nodding to a very spruce elderly gentleman, on the platform.

At first, Roger failed to recognize him; a tweed suit, a pot hat, white gaiters and a cane, effected a complete transformation, and, yes—he had certainly darkened his moustache!

"Well, Rosie. Hullo, Hope! Glad to see you; I had no idea you were in this train. Heard you were expected at No. 15."

"Yes? I've just run down for a couple of days. All well, I hope?"

"All well; your aunt younger than ever, and mad about golf. Heard of my luck, eh?" surveying him with triumph.

"Yes, Miss Yaldwin told me. I am pleased to hear we are going to be cousins."

"Ha, ha! So we are! Rose, Collins will see to your small things. The fly is here. I did not bring the phaeton, as Clara wants me to take her out this evening."

"And how does the collection prosper, sir?" inquired Hope, as they stood by the open fly.

"Oh, by Jove! haven't you heard? Of course not. Get in! Get in!" excitedly waving him into the fly. "Your trap can follow with your things, and I will tell you all about it. No time like the present."

(The stamps had always been his very good friends, thought Roger. They now procured him a seat opposite Rose Yaldwin.)

"Wapshott is dead," burst out the general with unaffected callousness. "His collection, of course, was for sale. I went straight to his man of business, the day before the funeral, and said: 'Now, how about those stamps? I suppose you will dispose of them?' 'Yes,' he said, 'if there is anyone fool enough to buy.' 'Here you are,' I answered, 'I'm the fool! Name your price.' My dear sir," laying a heavy and impressive hand, on Roger's knee, "I could have had the collection for nothing—for a song—but I'm a man of honour, and I would not rob the dead. Barnes is an idiot. He doesn't know a stamp from a crest, and has no idea of the value of them, nor of the enormous interest attached

to a collection, and how it brushes up one's geography, and history. If he had sent the collection to an expert, as I suggested, he would have been wise. Luckily for me, Wapshott kept his stamps very, very, close, and there was no *rush*! Well, I offered Barnes a cheque for three hundred pounds, and he literally jumped at it. I wrote it out, then and there, and I took the collection home, on the spot, in a cab. Of course there was a heap of rubbish, lots of reprints, and forgeries, but there were gems—gems, sir. I picked out a blue Natal, a very rare Cashmere, a yellow Honolulu—in all, about twenty; and I sold the *leavings* for five hundred pounds. There was a stroke of business! Barnes met me one day and said: 'I thought I'd got the best of *you* over those stamps, but I find that there's more money in them than I supposed. I am told you cleared hundreds of pounds over the bargain.' 'Yes, I did,' I allowed. I informed him that I had made seven hundred on the business. Was it not splendid?" rubbing his hands with ecstasy. "Here we are," he added; "and you must come in and see the blue Natal this very afternoon. Rose will give you some tea. Eh, Rose?"

"Thank you, general," said Roger, as he alighted; "I shall be delighted. *Au revoir.*"



## CHAPTER XXIX.

## FIRST ON THE LIST.

ROGER HOPE had quitted No. 15 on a bitter winter's night, and he now returned to it on a blazing August afternoon, but, save for the difference in seasons, it was absolutely unchanged. There was the hat brush in its little nook in the hall, and Annie's green linnet chirruping on the first landing. In the drawing-room, he found his aunt sitting beside the open window, and William the Conqueror lolling on the sill, instead of both being in front of the fire as formerly. The chairs, with their fat silk cushions, the palms, Indian curiosities, and big photograph screens, were all apparently just as he had left them. He could not have explained the fact, or offered any sane reason, but he had quite a sentimental affection for his aunt's pretty drawing-room. Mrs. Baggot sprang up to meet him, with the agility of sixteen, and, throwing her arms round his neck, said :

"Last time, I kissed you for your mother, Roger, like the old song. *Now* I kiss you for yourself. How are you, my dear boy?"

"Oh, nearly all right; but they thought I had better get off before the rains, on account of this

fever I've had hanging about me. The regiment comes home this trooping season, you know."

"I am glad to hear it. I cannot compliment you on your looks. Roger, you are a perfect wreck."

"Well, I can compliment you, Aunt Polly. You are looking not one hour older, or a day over forty."

"You are a humbug. I am getting as wrinkled as a piece of wash-leather! But come along, and sit down here. I suppose, you have heard our grand piece of news?"

"Yes; about Clara and the general."

"They say one wedding makes another, and I'm really very uneasy about Annie and Mr. Friar. You remember him — the emaciated-looking curate? But if Annie leaves me, I shall have to get married myself," and she laughed. "When did you arrive?"

"The day before yesterday, and I thought I'd just run down, and see how you were all getting on. You know, to a man home from India, a four hours' journey is no more than crossing a road."

"My dear boy, pray make no apologies. When you were home before, you came to see me last of all, and now I am first on the list; I am only too glad to think you like us. By the way, who told you about Clara?"

"Miss Yaldwin. I travelled part of the way with her."

"Oh, that was quite a pleasant little coincidence. She is still Miss Yaldwin, you see. Are you not glad of that?"

"I don't know, Aunt Polly. Why should I be glad?"

"You used to like her so much—she is quite one of the prettiest girls I have ever seen."

"Yes, but—

'If she be not fair for me,  
What care I how fair she be?'

"Oh, is that it?" surveying him critically; "but why should she not be fair for you?"

"I don't know."

"Roger! Upon my word—you and your 'don't know'! I could shake you. Have you ever asked her?"

"Yes—I wrote," he admitted gloomily.

"And what was your answer?"

"None—neither 'yes' nor 'no.'"

"And you were afraid to take silence for consent, eh? It's my opinion she never got it," she added cheerfully.

"That may be—I sent it in an unusual fashion."

"Why in the world did you not speak to her? I always think it so cowardly to write. A girl prefers being asked—please to remember that in future."

"That's all very fine, Aunt Polly ; but when I was here last, I never had a chance of speaking to her."

The old lady pondered for a moment, smiled slightly, and then said :

"Well, I will guarantee you plenty of opportunities *now*. Try again, Roger ; you will find that it will all come right. Dear me, if it comes off, how pleased I shall be, and so will Annie. As for Clara, she will be your grandmother-in-law. Oh, dear, dear me !" bursting into peals of laughter, and throwing herself back in her chair, "that will be too, too, funny. Clara is lunching out to-day," she gasped, when she had recovered ; "she is extremely busy about her *trousseau*."

"I suppose you will be forced to part with him," said Roger, pointing to where William lay, outstretched, and asleep ; "but, at any rate, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that he is only next door, and that you can still supply him with canaries."

"Oh, you don't know, of course, that the general is going to sell the lease of No. 13, and take a house in town ; Clara thinks Morpington too dull, and the society much too ancient, and decrepit."

"Does she, indeed ? Well, Annie," to his cousin, "here I am again, you see," as Miss Baggot entered.

He kissed her this time, for he liked old Annie, as he called her, and Annie's sallow face became a sort of deep fawn. He had never kissed Clara!

Lunch was now announced, and as they sat at the round table, Mrs. Baggot, who was brimming over with good spirits, exclaimed:

"Well, I declare, this *is* nice; just the three of us here, and quite like old times."

It seemed to Roger, that his aunt and Annie were enacting the part of mice, in the absence of the cat, and that the approaching departure of Clara would not be harrowing to their feelings. Annie, who always showed her good-will, by pressing dainties on her friends, and was secretly concerned, to see her cousin so much altered, vainly plied him with all the good things of the season.

Conversation, after drifting out to India, and then round Morpington, settled down comfortably next door; and the general, his money, his stamps, his good qualities, his fine settlements, were exhaustively discussed.

"Rose is quite an heiress now," remarked Annie. "She has all her grandmother's money."

"And in consequence, has received several offers of marriage," supplemented Mrs. Baggot. "It is a very pleasant thing, for a girl to have money of her own—it gives her plenty of choice—I had money myself, you know."

"But I am sure my uncle never gave it a thought. If a man cares for a girl, he does not think of her money."

"Pray how do you know, Master Roger? All the same, it is very nice of you to pay a compliment to your old auntie, and I must honestly admit that Henry was quite indifferent to my *dot*. What are you going to do this afternoon? Shall we take a drive? I never ride now."

"I have promised to go in next door about four o'clock," he answered a little shyly, "to look at the great stamp."

"What a wonderful attraction these stamps have!" said Mrs. Baggot, casting up her hands. "I am glad that you are of an *adhesive* nature, Roger. I shall get you to take in a note for me—I want the general, and Rose to come to dinner."

---

## CHAPTER XXX.

### A STRAY NOTE.

"Flowers of all hue, and without thorn the rose."

—MILTON

AT four o'clock to the second, Captain Hope presented himself at No. 13; was admitted, and actually welcomed by Leach. This was a change, but there were other changes here; he scarcely recognized the house, especially the drawing-room;

gone were the iron-grey curtains, the files of stiff chairs, the cribbage-board, the old lady with her ear-trumpet, and the mynar (he was in disgrace and banishment in the kitchen, as his remarks were far too personal for Clara's delicate sensibilities ; he was a coarse, uncourteous, bird ; she often wished that William the Conqueror would eat him). There were pretty chairs and sofas, a piano turned out backwards, and fashionably draped ; there were palms, flowers, and, oh, suggestive item, two little fat green love-birds in a cage ! Evidently the general was determined to have a modern home, for a modern wife. The door opened, and he came into the room, followed by Rose in a cool white dress. After vigorously discussing the weather, the condition of the army, and the volunteer review, the general said :

"Well, come along now and I'll show you *the* stamp. I won't detain you long, but will send you back to Rose for a cup of tea. I've some business letters to write for the next post, and I have to take Clara out when the great heat of the day is over ; my time is not my own now, you see," he added jocosely.

Thus talking as he preceded him, he conducted Roger into the well-known study ; it was but little changed, save that it was pervaded by large-sized, flattering photographs of Clara. There was one

on his writing-table, three on the chimney-piece, two on the wall. The great treasure, was deliberately produced, and flaunted before Roger's eyes, but he gave it a very indifferent, not to say cursory inspection ; he did not seem to care, when his host repeated in a husky, confidential whisper :

"And I got it for nothing—for nothing, sir."

"Look here," said Roger, controlling an insane impulse to throw it into the fire ; "may I ask you something ?"

"Of course. You are not going to ask me if I am sure it's not a reprint ? I can swear, that it's genuine," banging the table with his fist.

"Reprint be —— !" He swallowed down a bad word as he said, "I want to ask, if Miss Yaldwin is engaged to be married."

"Bless my soul, sir ! not to my knowledge."

"Then if it is a clear course, may I try my luck ?"

"You may, with all my heart ; yes, that you may. There is no one I'd like so well. I've always fancied you, and I'm sure Clara will be delighted." (Poor innocent old man.) "You know Rose has my wife's fortune—five hundred a year—and I'll settle something handsome on her—her father's share—and, look here, Hope," with a sudden, wild, burst, of generosity, "I'll leave you my stamps ; you'll value them. Of course Clara has a taste that way, and a fair amateur collection,



but women have not the same sound feeling on these matters as men—but that is strictly between you and me."

"My dear general, this is very good of you," said Roger, rising to his feet, "but is is rather premature. It is by no means certain, that Miss Yaldwin will have me."

"Then, my good fellow, just go and ask her at once; there is no time like the present—short and sharp has always been my maxim." (Mrs. Skyler would scarcely agree with this.) "I'll be like what's his name, and hold the bridge; you shall have five minutes without interruption; you can easily say all you have to say, in five minutes. I wish you luck." And he pushed him into the hall.

Rose was arranging some flowers, as he entered. She looked up and smiled, and said:

"I am afraid you are a humbug! You cannot have made a very exhaustive examination of the stamps."

"No—ah—the fact is, I scarcely looked at them. I wanted to see you, Miss Yaldwin, and to ask you if you got the note which I put in at the top of the bouquet?"

"Note," she repeated, colouring; "no, there was no note."

"You know," he pursued doggedly, "when I came back from the ball, I had still your bouquet.

I was desperate at not seeing you, and I wanted to send you a line. My time was to be reckoned by minutes, so I dashed into my aunt's boudoir, and scribbled off a note. I felt that I *could* not go, without some sort of an answer from you. I stuck this note on the top of the flowers, where you could not fail to *see* it, and Annie promised me that she would give you the bouquet with her own hands."

"The bouquet was brought by a servant, for Annie was ill—there was no note," and, blushing a guilty smile, she added, "You know my love for keeping pressed flowers; I—I have the bouquet still."

"You have!" he echoed incredulously.

"Yes; I kept it in water, and cut the stalks, and it lasted for days, and when it was quite dead I rolled it up in silver paper, and put it away. You see," she pleaded apologetically, "it was my very first bouquet; I have not looked at it for ages."

"Would you mind looking at it now—or am I giving you a lot of trouble?"

Rose left the room at once. Her heart was beating fast—no, it was not from running up-stairs. What did he mean about a note, and an answer, and being quite desperate? She pulled out a drawer and got the bouquet—the bouquet, indeed! unfastened the paper, that enclosed its dry remains, and spread it out before her. The once lovely

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white nosegay, was now a mere wisp of withered leaves, and twigs. She untied the string, cut the wire, and it fell to pieces; and, behold, there in the middle lay a crumpled letter—a note written on Mrs. Baggot's crested paper, much discoloured, but legible. Rose trembled as she read it. It said:

"DEAR ROSE,

"You have broken your promise, and I am just starting. Why did you not come to the ball? I am desperately disappointed. I wanted to ask you a question, and to take away my answer from your lips. I must scrawl the question here whilst the cab waits. You know that I love you Rose; will you be my wife, when I return to England—please God, in a year's time, or less? Send me a line—yes, or no. Something has come between us of late; I never can see or speak to you, try as I will. The *Euphrates* sails to-morrow afternoon. I can get your answer before we start: one word, which will make me happy or miserable.

"Yours always,

"R. HOPE."

It was evidently written in hot haste, but Rose managed to master every word. She read it twice, and then, by a sudden impulse of self-vindication, she put it back to its place among the stalks, rolled

it up in them, and carried the bouquet down to its donor.

She advanced into the drawing-room, looking rather white, and laid her treasure on the top of the cottage piano, and saying as she did so, with a sort of catch in her breath :

"It was there—I have found it," and she held up the note. "Some one must have pushed it down ; it was twisted in among the stalks, as you can see."

"You have read it ?"

She gave a little nod and blushed prodigiously.

"And after waiting for eighteen months, may I hope for an answer now ?"

Rose looked down, but made no reply.

He came a step nearer.

"Do you think you could accept me, as companion, instead of the pleasant elderly lady ?"

A brief flicker of a smile, was evidently considered a satisfactory reply. The general's five minutes had been lengthened into fifteen.

Rose stood turning over the remains of the dead bouquet with mechanical fingers, listening to the eager words of her companion.

"There is nothing to prevent our being married at once," he was saying with lover-like promptness. "This is August, and September is a splendid month abroad."

"You are going a great deal too fast—we must consider grandpapa's plans."

"Well, I won't ask you to take part in a double wedding."

"No," she interrupted with a smile. "That would be too ridiculous, and *we* can afford to wait."

"It seems to me that I have waited a good while already," he protested.

"But surely, that was not my fault."

The lady whose fault it had been was now actually in the hall, having an animated altercation with her *fiancé*, for the general had opened the door in person, and said most mysteriously:

"Come into my study, Clara—you must not go into the drawing-room just now."

"Nonsense, dearest. What *do* you mean? Is the chimney on fire?"

"I mean," he whispered, "that Hope has just asked my permission, to speak to Rose."

Before he could add another word, the handle was briskly whisked round, and the door of the drawing-room flung wide open.

Yes, sure enough. There were Rose and Roger standing beside the piano (which occupied a conspicuous place), and on the top of it was spread out what looked like a bundle of withered twigs and stalks. In a second, the astute lady had

divined the bouquet, and her equally astute cousin had divined her guilt! He saw it in her heightened colour, and her stealthy glance. Yes, she was the culprit. She had watched Roger insert the note, and, when he had rushed upstairs to change, she had got a long knitting needle out of Annie's basket, and poked the *billet doux* entirely out of sight—knowing well, that Rose Yaldwin would be the last girl to search for one.

So, she was too late! She saw it in Rose's blushes, and in their happy faces. There was nothing now for her to do, but accept the inevitable with what grace she could muster; but she had great command over herself, and was always equal to any emergency.

"Ah! I see how it is. You sly people," graciously extending both hands to Roger, and turning to kiss Rose. "I am so charmed. Now we shall be doubly connected. It seems, my dear, that after all"—and as she smiled into the girl's face, her squint was positively startling—"you had never given up—Hope?"

"It is fortunate for me that she had not," replied Roger. "She will never be without it as long as she lives, for," placing her hand in the general's, "she has promised to be Mrs. Hope."

The general beamed on the young couple; kissed Rose warmly, wrung Roger's fingers, and



with a promise to dine next door, he hurried back to his letters, leaving the betrothed pair alone with Mrs. Skyler—their evil genius.

Roger now remembered, with unpleasant distinctness, that he had left the note and bouquet in Clara's neighbourhood, the night of the ball, and felt a firm conviction, that he owed all his love troubles to the fascinating woman before him, who, with her hands locked in an engaging attitude, was gazing at him meditatively, with her head on one side.

"Dear me," she cried, "how interesting! Roger, you are Hope. Rose, it seems, has been the embodiment of Faith. And I ——"

"And you," he interposed, his mind sore with an exasperating sense of injury, "would scarcely present yourself as Charity. That would never do. I have not had a chance, as yet, of congratulating you. Allow me to do so now. We shall be, as you mentioned, doubly connected, and I cannot tell you, how I am looking forward to the time when you, dear Clara, will be not only my cousin but my—*grandmamma*!"

\* \* \* \* \*

Mrs. Baggot's little dinner was a brilliant success. It is not often, that a party of six, includes two engaged couples. The younger pair had the heart-felt sympathies of Mrs. Baggot and Annie. Annie

looked upon them as her special *protégés*, and her mother was enchanted ; seldom had her spirits been so high, or her eyes so bright, her pleasantries so many. She kissed Rose repeatedly ; she took off her best emerald ring, and slipped it on her middle finger, saying :

"At any rate, there is your first wedding present, my love." She made Roger carve, and actually placed herself between him and Rose, saying, "I hope you will never have a worse person than me to come between you," and altogether behaved like a fussy old lunatic, in the opinion of her eldest daughter.

Clara was splendidly dressed — over-dressed. The body of her black gown, was blazing with diamond stars, swallows, lizards, and frogs. A costly bouquet lay beside her. She talked of her future French maid, and her new landau. Her laugh was loud and constant, and she was effusively affectionate to her "dear general," as she called him ; but there was a hard, set, look, about her face, that afforded a strong contrast to the radiant expression of the younger *fiancée*, who had as yet neither flowers, or diamonds, nor even an engagement ring.

After dinner, there ensued the inevitable game of whist. Clara made a bold attempt to thrust Rose into her place, as partner to the general, and

thus secure a *tête-à-tête* with Roger ; but she was foiled in her manœuvre, and, to her undisguised disgust, the newly-betrothed pair were allowed to withdraw into a corner, to whisper together over a book of photographs. Many a time, Clara's malignant eye wandered from her cards, in their direction ; and her mistakes, in consequence, were particularly flagrant. Clara hated whist, and dreaded these games with her future lord, and master. A whist table was the one impregnable position where she had not the smallest control over him or his temper. He scolded her openly, and glared, and thumped on the table, and called out in a stentorian voice :

"God bless my soul, woman ! Are you an idiot ? That was a thirteenth card !"

And all this before Roger. It was really too mortifying.

Meanwhile, Rose was inquiring in a low voice :

"How could you say it, Roger ?"

"Say what ?" he whispered in reply.

"About Clara being your grandmother. Did you not see how dreadfully angry she looked ? She will never forgive you."

"I don't care. I was dreadfully angry with her. And as to forgiveness, she is in my debt, and I am not sure, that I shall ever grant her a pardon."

"Why, what has she done ?"

"I cannot tell you just now, but I will tell you something else instead. Your grandfather has offered us the mynar."

"Oh, has he?"

"And I have accepted him, subject to your approval. We can keep him in the hall to receive visitors, and to do the agreeable."

"I shall be delighted to have him! He never calls me horrible names as he does Clara. *I* am always his good girl, and his own Rose."

"Indeed. And pray, who has taught him to be so affectionate?"

"Grandpapa," she answered with a happy laugh. "Times are changed you see."

"I see. But your grandfather, and the bird, will have to make up their minds to another change! They must forego their claims, in deference to mine, for now you are *my* Rose—notwithstanding delays, obstructions, lost letters, and," to himself he added, with a glance at the whist table, "in spite of my clever Cousin Clara."

THE END.

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